PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 291

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1996–97

COMPRISING PERIOD
24 February—6 March 1997

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24 February 1997

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 291**

EIGHTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1996–97

House of Commons

Monday 24 February 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Job Security (Civil Service)

2. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he intends to meet unions representing civil servants to discuss job security. [15516]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): I recently met civil service union representatives and job security was one of the issues that was raised.

Mr. Ainger: I am sure that it was, given that the Government's policy has, over the years, meant contracting out, privatisation, the fragmentation of the civil service and a huge loss of morale. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, over the past five years, 70,000 permanent civil service jobs have gone and been replaced by only 7,500 temporary jobs, which do not have performance-related pay, sick pay, pension rights or any sort of security? Is it any wonder that the trade unions put the matter on the top of their agenda? Is it not time that the Government accepted that, if they are to restore morale in the civil service, they must address job security?

Mr. Freeman: The "Competing for Quality" initiative in the public sector has been a tremendous success. I note that the Labour party would effectively cease its operation. The initiative has brought savings to the taxpayer of some 20 per cent., on average, in the services tested, which is equivalent to at least £200 million per annum. The total saved must be fast approaching £1 billion in terms of recurrent savings. Casual employees form about 5 per cent. of the civil service. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman can draw any conclusions about the destabilising effect of that. We believe that civil servants should build careers in the public sector with confidence. I pay tribute to the civil servants who serve our country so well.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the unemployment rate in Mid-Staffordshire is 3.7 per cent., that in the new parliamentary constituency of Lichfield, it is only 3.4 per cent., and that some of those people work in the civil service? Does he agree that the last thing that we want for job security, whether in the civil service or the private sector, is the introduction of the social chapter?

Mr. Freeman: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the implications of the social chapter. The House may be interested to learn that there were 38,100 departures from the civil service in 1995-96 but that only 3,400 were compulsory redundancies, a very small proportion of the total. With the economy in such a vibrant mood and with unemployment falling, I hope that many, or all, of them will by now have found jobs.

Government Policy Co-ordination

3. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent review he has conducted of the co-ordination of Government policy; what conclusions were arrived at; and if he will make a statement. [15517]

The Paymaster General (Mr. Michael Bates): We keep the co-ordination of Government policy under constant review and take action as necessary to maintain effective co-ordination.

Mr. O'Brien: Has the Cabinet committee on policy co-ordination deregulated access to information covered

by the Data Protection Act 1984? Constituents of mine have received letters from the Prime Minister requesting support and assistance for the Conservative party. Many of my constituents who have shares in private companies feel that they have been betrayed by that breach of the Act. Was that done with the agreement of the committee? If so, I think that the whole Cabinet is in breach of the Act.

Mr. Bates: That is straying close to the bounds of what is in order in respect of the question. However, the hon. Gentleman makes a serious point, which I shall try to answer. First, the matter is not covered by the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. Secondly, the mailing was a tremendous success, which bodes well for future similar mailings.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the most important policy to co-ordinate is the Government's economic policy? Does he agree that we have had unequalled success in western Europe in reducing unemployment and generating growth? That has made us the strongest economy of Europe and the envy of our colleagues in the European Union.

Mr. Bates: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It sounds as though he spent the early hours of this morning reading the Prime Minister's excellent article in the *Financial Times*, which spelt out precisely our economic success, the fact that we are now in the sixth successive year of growth and that that record is the envy of Europe. All that success would be put at risk by the policies of the Labour party.

5. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent estimate he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's work on the co–ordination of Government policy. [15521]

Mr. Freeman: We continue to note our success in co-ordinating policies that deliver economic prosperity, uphold decent, commonsense values in pursuit of law, order and justice and provide first-class public services.

Mr. Grocott: As we now know that one of the Prime Minister's strategies with which he hopes to inspire us during the general election campaign is his passionate support for hereditary peers, can the Minister tell us whether the Government have any plans to create more hereditary peers? The Foreign Secretary is visiting his European counterparts in the European Union to promote the British way forward and I wonder whether he will recommend to those colleagues that the one thing that their democracies urgently need is an infusion of dukes, marquesses, earls and viscounts.

Mr. Freeman: I am sure that we were entertained by that witty supplementary, but the truth is that, during the debate on Thursday, the Leader of the Opposition profoundly lost the argument because he and the Labour party were unable to answer all the questions put by the Prime Minister, particularly about the nonsense of creating a Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Sykes: In terms of co-ordinating Government policy, may I express the hope that the Government's mailing system is better run than that of the Labour party? I should inform my right hon. Friend that my niece received a letter inviting her to vote for the Labour party and she is just 11 years old.

Mr. Freeman: Well, she is obviously not young enough to know.

Mr. Derek Foster: In his co-ordinating role, was the right hon. Gentleman one of the 20 desperadoes who this morning gathered around the Cabinet table as they contrived the most futile job salvage operation in political history? In that role, will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House why eight top quangos, which spend £13,000 million of taxpayers' money, have been packed with business men whose companies have bankrolled the Tory party to the tune of £4 million? Was not the Nolan committee established to deal with that abuse of the appointments system? Why can we not have the election now so that a Labour Government can begin to clean up the quango state?

Mr. Freeman: The right hon. Gentleman will know of the recommendations of Lord Nolan, the appointment of a Commissioner for Public Appointments and the rules that have been applied for many, many years by this Administration, and which are now formalised, to guarantee that appointment is on merit. The right hon. Gentleman insinuates that anyone with any connection with the Conservative party is not, by definition, someone to be considered for an appointment on the basis of merit. That is a logical inconsistency.

Public Information (European Union)

6. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what role he has in respect of the co–ordination of Government policy for public information on European Union issues and statistics. [15522]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine): My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has overall responsibility for the Government's policy towards the European Union, including the presentation of that policy.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As we have a special problem in Britain because of divisions in both main parties on European Union, and as the public have less confidence in the words of politicians from either of those parties, would there not be some merit in responding to the rather alarming expensive EU propaganda by establishing an independent body to tell people the facts about how much the average family spends on the net contribution and how much that family spends because of the agriculture policy? Would there not also be some merit in telling people the truth about Europe and about the huge damage that the EU is inflicting, particularly on low-income families?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am as keen as my hon. Friend on the dissemination of truth about Europe. I know that my hon. Friend will welcome the fact that we are attracting 40 per cent. of all inward investment into Europe, we have the fastest growing economy in western Europe and the City of London is still the prime financial

market of Europe. Those are important aspects of the success of the Government's policy and involve our continued place at the heart of Europe.

Mr. Bermingham: Would not the Deputy Prime Minister have difficulty in answering questions on the subject when the Foreign Secretary says one thing, the Chancellor of the Exchequer says another and the Prime Minister another? Is not the reality that the Government have no fixed and clear policy on Europe, but are at sixes and sevens? Is it not time that they come clean and say whether they are for or against monetary union? To answer the question—of course I am for it.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I notice the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) nodding his head in enthusiastic agreement at the idea that there is unity in the Labour party.

Dr. Hampson: I endorse the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) that we need accurate statistics; the public need to know what is happening. There is an ever-increasing trend of trade from this country into Europe; more than 50 per cent. of our exports now go to Europe. There are people—who will not be named—who consciously try to mislead people about the situation. Our deficit with Europe is steadily falling, whereas our deficit with the rest of the world is increasing.

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes important points, but the critical point is that we in this country continue to drive the European economy in the direction that has proved so successful to the British economy. The continuation of that drive requires the re-election of a Conservative Government and the avoidance of the social contract, the minimum wage and the restoration of privilege for the trade unions.

Mr. Prescott: In any review of the co-ordination of Government policy on European issues, has the Deputy Prime Minister taken account of the views expressed by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) who, contrary to the Government's scaremongering claims, stated that the European social chapter posed no threat to jobs or British industry? Is that not a further example of the bitter divisions within the Government?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It will come as a surprise to the right hon. Gentleman that, on this rare occasion, my views on the minimum wage are more likely to be in keeping with his than with those of my right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister. The deputy leader of the Labour party was right when he said of the minimum wage that it would cost jobs and that

"any silly fool knew that".

Deregulation

8. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the benefits of the deregulation initiative for small businesses. [15525]

Mr. Freeman: Our policy of fewer, better, simpler regulations contributes greatly to the competitiveness of small businesses. For example, 500,000 of the smallest companies no longer need to have their accounts audited, and the Government are consulting on raising the audit threshold to £350,000.

Mr. Rathbone: Such information is very welcome because small businesses will be the great oaks of the future, but the Government are still issuing infinitely more statutory instruments than deregulation orders. I hope that my right hon. Friend, other Ministers and the Deputy Prime Minister will continue assiduously to pursue opportunities for greater deregulation in future.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We shall be spurred on in our efforts. I calculate that, in 1996, only 228 statutory instruments placed any burden on business and, during the course of that year, we repealed or amended more than 500 examples of primary and secondary legislation. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to underline that point once again. We are currently achieving what a number of my hon. Friends suggest—that every time we make a regulation affecting business, we repeal one.

Mr. Pike: Is the Chancellor aware that most small businesses find it surprising that, to date, the Deregulation Committee has dealt with different forms of gambling, but done nothing to help businesses? Is the Tory party's election manifesto going to have a roulette wheel or two dice on its cover?

Mr. Freeman: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman appears to feel that way, although I hope that, given his great work on the Scrutiny Committee, a more objective analysis would lead him to support the notion that we are making real progress on, for example, the amendment of the Trustee Investments Act 1961. We have just laid an order before the Scrutiny Committee on that. That should save about £40 million per annum. I am grateful to the Committee for the progress that it has made on the Deregulation (Bills of Exchange) Order 1996, which should save up to £40 million to £50 million per annum. The Committee's work is very much appreciated.

Mr. Steen: Does the Minister agree that the Labour party, far from backing deregulation of small businesses, supports more rules, more regulations and more Acts of Parliament, which in turn involves more civil servants, greater public cost and greater intrusion into people's lives? Is not the truth about the Labour party with regard to deregulation that it does not like it and will not support it?

Mr. Freeman: The natural reaction of any socialist party is to introduce not only more regulation— *[Interruption.]* The use of the word "socialist" appears to have caused some embarrassment among those on the Labour Benches. I repeat: the natural reaction of a socialist party is to regulate.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that it is glib and very easy to talk about deregulation? Not so many years ago, I heard the same from Tory Ministers talking about deregulation when we were discussing animal feed. Is not the truth that, although we can have fancy gimmicks such as deregulation, most regulations are there to protect the people? If the Tory Government had done the decent thing

and dealt with animal feed regulations, we would not have had BSE and a cost of billions of pounds to the Exchequer.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been paying attention when I dealt with that point in my winding-up speech on Monday 17 February. It is a calumny to argue that the—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the shadow Deputy Prime Minister is not familiar with that word. The regulations proposed by the last Labour Government would have had absolutely no effect in dealing with BSE, and the hon. Gentleman should know that.

Mr. David Shaw: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many businesses in the Dover and Deal area are employing more people than they did last year, that unemployment in Dover is half that 22 miles away in Calais, and that those businesses that are employing more people—including, in some cases, French people—say that they are successful because this country is less heavily regulated than France or Germany?

Mr. Freeman: We have a more flexible market, which is why our unemployment rate is half that of Germany.

Deregulation (Leisure Industry)

9. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what new proposals he has in respect of the deregulation of the leisure industry. [15526]

Mr. Freeman: Ten deregulation orders affecting the leisure industry are currently going through the parliamentary process. They range from simplifying liquor licence transfers to allowing mid-week football pools.

Mr. Flynn: Was it not deregulation and the revocation of firework safety orders in 1986, 1993 and 1995 that led directly to the three deaths of men when they were using mortar fireworks and aerial fireworks? Is it not true that the Government, in some panic, had to push through new regulations in December 1996 to correct the problems caused by their deregulation laws? Should we not look again at all the deregulation measures, not in the way in which the Government look at them, to appease their paymasters in big business, but on safety grounds? Is it not true that, in those three cases, and possibly others, deregulation kills?

Mr. Freeman: I do not for one moment believe that to be the case. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important to proceed with the deregulation initiative on the assumption that one will not weaken safety standards, harm the environment or weaken the proper protection for the consumer and the employee. All that is sensible. Our initiative on the deregulation programme that is under way is to reduce the burden on businesses, large and small. The 44 deregulation orders that the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) is considering should save businesses, including small businesses, more than £100 million per annum.

Mr. Brooke: When addressing the question of deregulation on licensing procedures, will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that as much attention will be given to members of the public who are affected by the licence applications as is given to the licence applicants themselves?

Mr. Freeman: I believe that I can give my right hon. Friend that assurance. In terms of nuisance, noise, and the implications for planning law, it is certainly important to our citizens who live close by pubs, casinos, bingo halls and other leisure centres that their interests also be taken into account.

Open Government

10. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proposals he has to ensure more openness in government. [15527]

Mr. Bates: We are committed to making government ever more open and accountable.

Mr. Banks: The governing Conservative party would be a bit more convincing about the openness of government if it were more open about its funding. For instance, when will the £400,000 that Mr. Asil Nadir stole and then gave to the Conservative party be returned to the creditors? What about the money that that crook, Mr. Octav Botnar, gave the Conservative party? Why will not the Conservative party tell the people from where it gets its funds? Could it be that the Conservatives are heavily funded by foreign crooks and foreign fascists and do not want people to know that?

Mr. Bates: Before making such statements, the hon. Gentleman would do well to consider the inquiry currently being undertaken by Sir Gordon Downey into the funding of the office of the Leader of the Opposition. We do not want wild, spurious allegations, but a little more openness would certainly be welcome. Strangely, almost every move towards more openness that the Government have made—making parents more aware of the performance of schools, and patients more aware of the performance of hospitals, for example—has been opposed by the Labour party.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Would it not be a good example of openness in government if the Leader of the Opposition were to announce which Ministries will be controlled by the deputy leader of the Labour party, in the unlikely event of a Labour Government? After all, we want to know—and so does he.

Mr. Bates: I thank my hon. Friend for his astute observation. I note that the deputy Leader of the Opposition muttered from a sedentary position just now that he wants to control all of them. That may reassure some people, but it is precisely the message that we would rather like to convey to a wider audience.

Government Policy Co-ordination

11. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what criteria he uses for assessing the effectiveness of his responsibilities for co-ordinating Government policy. [15528]

Mr. Bates: There is overwhelming evidence that the Government's policies are delivering economic

prosperity, upholding decent commonsense values in pursuit of law, order and justice and providing first-class public services.

Mr. Hughes: That was not an answer to the question, so I shall push the Minister on the question that I asked. What consideration was given last week to how effectively Government policy is co-ordinated? The Deputy Prime Minister or his colleagues either heard directly or had reported to them the Foreign Secretary's statement on the "Today" programme that the Government were "hostile" to a single European currency. It was then confirmed to them that the Foreign Secretary had confirmed that he did not wish to withdraw the statement; and it was only in the evening that they managed to issue what appeared to be a variation of that statement in agreement with the Chancellor. Is not getting the Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary to say the same thing a fairly good test of how effectively Government policy is co-ordinated?

Mr. Bates: They were of course saying the same thing—that was made abundantly clear later that evening when they both made a statement to that effect. The matter is therefore closed. People outside the House are interested not so much in the alleged differences inside the Conservative Cabinet as in the fact that only one party in the House is wholly united in wanting a federal united states of Europe—the hon. Gentleman's own.

Mr. Congdon: When ensuring the effective implementation of Government policy, what steps does my hon. Friend take to make certain that local authorities play the role that they are required to by legislation proposed by the Government? In respect of community care, what steps are taken to ensure that local councils do not discriminate against the private sector and spend more on their own homes, thereby denying others places? In respect of compulsory competitive tendering, what steps are being taken to ensure that councils do not discriminate in favour of their own workers?

Mr. Bates: My hon. Friend makes a solid point. In relation to community care, he will be aware that we stipulated that 85 per cent. of new beds must be put into the private sector. If that were not the case, many private sector beds would be left empty. Not many local authorities are meeting that criterion. That is why, through the Audit Commission, we have produced indicators that show the performance of different authorities.

Compulsory competitive tendering, which saves public services some £400 million a year, would be abolished by Labour.

Manufacturing Competitiveness

12. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he proposes to increase the international competitiveness of British manufacturing.

[15530]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Government have created the enterprise culture, which allows manufacturing firms to prosper. The three White Papers on competitiveness contain nearly 500 new initiatives, many of which are directed at manufacturing.

Mr. Mitchell: Does the Minister accept that all the cheapjack measures that he advocates, such as cutting costs, firing workers and cutting the social costs of protection, avail nothing against the rise in the pound that is now occurring? Price is critical for manufacturing and if the pound goes up, that subsidises imports and penalises exports. Should not the Government be doing something about that, or are they just sitting back and hoping to get the counter-inflationary benefits, while leaving Labour to inherit the disastrous whirlwind that will ensue for manufacturing?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will realise that the reason why such a high proportion of all inward investment in Europe comes to this country is that men and women across the world who must make judgments about such matters know our economy to be the most attractive place in which to invest. If I had to back their judgment against that of the hon. Gentleman, I would have not the slightest difficulty in making the choice.

Mr. Viggers: Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) for drawing attention to the highly competitive nature of British industry? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that situation will continue, unless it is spoilt by a Labour Government, because Labour Governments have shown that, as night follows day, they bring higher taxation, more controls and more union influence?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. There is no secret about Labour's intention to increase taxes and introduce new taxes. There is to be a windfall tax, which is a direct tax on the pensioners of Britain and all those who pay their bills for utilities. There is to be a special penal tax in Scotland to punish the Scots for returning Labour Members of Parliament year in, year out. A range of social costs is to be imposed on British industry. All those are clearly highlighted as the direct threats of a Labour Government. One of the reasons why there will not be such a Government is that people realise that such threats exist.

Mr. Caborn: Let me remind the Deputy Prime Minister that the minimum wage is not part of the social chapter, as he said in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott).

In the light of today's announcement that yet another regional electricity company, Yorkshire Electric, has been taken over by the Americans, I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman is aware that well over 50 per cent. of the RECs in the United Kingdom are in American ownership. Only one out of the 12 RECs is in UK ownership. That is in stark contrast to the position in the United States, where it is impossible for a British company to have a majority ownership of a US electricity supply company. That creates a great deal of concern, as was evident from the series that was run in the *Daily Mirror* this week about who owns British industry and reciprocity with other countries. Will the right hon. Gentleman make strong representations to the Americans to open up their market, if they are to have such a strategic position in the UK market?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We constantly urge upon Americans and the rest of the world that they should open their economies as widely as we have done. We can see the benefits of having done so in the UK and we wish to spread best practice.

To return to the hon. Gentleman's initial point, the minimum wage is part of the social model of Europe. That is not a concept for which I am responsible; the shadow Foreign Secretary told the nation that Labour was comfortable with the European social model. That has led to rising levels of unemployment across the continent which we have avoided in the UK by avoiding the social model.

Ministerial Severance Payments

13. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to the answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *525*, if he will introduce measures to ensure that severance payments to Cabinet Ministers leaving office will be based on the salary scale in force on polling day. [15531]

Mr. Bates: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Mackinlay: How can it be right that, between midnight on polling day and when they hand in their seals of office, retiring Cabinet Ministers will have an increase of £4,000 in their severance pay? Parliament did not intend that. The proposition was that there would be an increase in Cabinet Members' pay after the election. It is outrageous that, by a technicality, Cabinet Ministers quitting after polling day—there will be a lot of them—will have an increase in their severance pay of £4,000 for about eight hours' work, during which time they will be sleeping and drinking.

Mr. Bates: Those rules were passed by the House on 10 July by 253 votes to 49. No members of the Government voted for the regulations but 100 members of the Labour party, including seven members of the shadow Cabinet, did. It could be a plot because similar predictions were made before the last election, when the rules were used to provide redundancy pay to Commissioner Kinnock when he ceased to be Leader of the Opposition. Perhaps the Labour party is checking out the rules to see whether a similar amount would be available to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Land Mines

26. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department is currently providing towards the destruction of land mines worldwide. [15545]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Dr. Liam Fox): Since April 1991, the Overseas Development Administration has funded humanitarian mine clearing-related activities totalling more than £22 million, including the UK share of European Community-funded projects.

Mrs. Clwyd: Do the Government recognise their moral responsibility to speed up the programme, particularly in countries such as Cambodia, where Britain helped to lay the land mines? Why do not they follow the example of Australia, France and now South Africa, which have distinctly said that they will no longer use land mines?

Dr. Fox: I am sorry that the hon. Lady cannot look at areas where the United Kingdom is driving forward the initiative on land mines. The United Kingdom and other EU countries have already banned the export of all anti-personnel mines to all destinations. We have suggested an export ban as an easy first step for members of the conference on disarmament in Geneva to take. That would be the practical way to proceed. As the hon. Lady mentioned Cambodia, may I pay tribute to those involved in the clearance project? As she will know, one of my constituents who was involved in that was taken hostage by the Khmer Rouge and the House should pay tribute to the outstanding bravery of those specifically and personally involved in that programme. The UK is committed to stopping the use of land mines and I wish that the hon. Lady would give us credit for that.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that this country has done an enormous amount to inaugurate and lead the world in banning land mines throughout the world, which is the right thing to do? Will my hon. Friend do everything possible to expedite the total elimination of land mines? Will he confirm that that is the Government's aim?

Dr. Fox: We have been the largest bilateral donor in Europe to humanitarian mine clearance activities in the past five years, and we should start to recognise that fact. We are working strenuously to introduce a global ban, but it will require international agreement. Unilateral renouncement by the UK would not reduce the dangers to civilians, which is our first consideration.

Mr. Foulkes: That answer is disappointing, in view not just of the huge cost of clearing mines but of the human tragedy of those killed and maimed by land mines. When will the Government join the Labour party, the Princess of Wales and the vast majority of the British people and agree a ban on the import, export, transfer, manufacture and use of all forms of anti-personnel land mines and their components?

Dr. Fox: The Princess of Wales's statement was entirely in line with the Government's policy—that we must work towards achieving a global ban. We have already instituted a complete export ban of all anti-personnel mines to all destinations. Our armed forces will not use anti-personnel mines in future operations unless, in exceptional circumstances, Ministers are fully consulted and agree that there is no alternative that ensures the safety of our troops. We cannot put that at risk but we are working towards a global ban. That is the Government's stated and clear objective.

Latin America

27. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the performance of ODA projects in Latin America. [15546]

Dr. Liam Fox: ODA projects in Latin America are monitored and reviewed regularly. Our view, which is shared by Latin American Governments, is that they are generally very effective in achieving their objectives.

Mr. Arnold: Bearing in mind that the trade winds that so affect our climate and rainfall originate in the Amazon basin, is not it extremely important that the great expertise that we have in this country—at Kew gardens, for example—is put at the disposal of the Brazilian Government and their many institutions to ensure sustainable use of the tropical rain forest that does not destroy it?

Dr. Fox: We are supporting substantial environmental programmes in the region, including forestry programmes in Brazil and Mexico and a sustainable rural development programme in Bolivia. The programmes are well regarded. A specific example to which I draw my hon. Friend's attention is Lake Mamiraua in Brazil, whose approach to forestry conservation is likely to form the basis of—in the inimitable language of the ODA—

"a large Brazilian multi-donor biodiversity corridors programme."

Mr. Corbyn: While the Minister is on the subject of the rain forest in Brazil, will he say what pressures he has been able to put on the Brazilian Government to protect the land rights of native peoples living in the Amazon rain forest; against water pollution from illegal mining; against driving people from their land to promote plantation, agriculture or other forms of farming; or, indeed, against the army killing people who stand up for the rights of indigenous peoples within the rain forest area? How is the large amount of European, World bank and ODA money for those projects monitored?

Dr. Fox: I shall start with the last point first. We monitor all our projects at least twice a year. In addition, each project is reviewed midway and on completion. Our aid programme to Brazil is large; it is our largest in the region. We have a very large forestry programme, and we make representations because one of the conditions of our supplying aid is sustainability and environmental considerations. We make those points regularly.

Know-how Fund (Central Europe)

28. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the work of the know-how fund in central Europe. [15547]

Dr. Liam Fox: The know-how fund contributes to economic and political reform in central Europe. Its work is described in the annual report for the financial year 1995-96, which was published on 15 July 1996. A copy has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Marshall: My right hon. Friend will accept that the know-how fund has been a great success, but does he agree that its success can be only a prelude to the expansion of NATO to include countries such as Poland, the Czech lands and Hungary and of the European Union so that those countries can be part of the free Europe instead of the communist Europe that was meant to bury the NATO Europe?

Dr. Fox: The aim of the know-how fund is to support transition to a pluralist democracy and a market economy. It is of great practical assistance in giving countries the necessary expertise to move to a market system, but having encouraged them to move away from communism and promised them a place in the western family of nations, we have a moral duty to ensure that those reforms are implemented in the best possible way. The know-how fund has been spectacularly successful in doing that.

Mr. Pike: What discussion have the Government had with the new Government in Romania to discuss what additional help can be given from the know-how fund and in other ways to help that country's transition to a new economy and to democracy?

Dr. Fox: I cannot give details of any discussions between ourselves and the Government of Romania, but we look at all the countries in the former eastern Europe to see what structural help we can offer with, for example, improvements to the stock market, the functioning of the banks and so on. Each country is looked at individually to see what market reforms most suit it, and there is a different model for each country because all countries have different needs and have experienced differing degrees of repression from the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Rathbone: Will my right hon. Friend give special attention to the application of additional know-how energy and funding to Bulgaria, where the liberalisation of the Government has been turned backwards? The clock has been turned back and the communists have taken over. It is only now beginning again the struggle to establish democratic practice properly.

Dr. Fox: My hon. Friend makes a very important point about assistance to Bulgaria. We are worried about potential economic collapse in Bulgaria and have contributed to the relief effort. With the European Commission, our bilateral donations for food, clothing and soup kitchens have given 20 mecu for income support. It is a very worrying situation, which the Government are monitoring closely.

Overseas Aid Budget (United Nations Target)

30. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of Her Majesty's Government towards achieving the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent. of gross national product to development assistance. [15549]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have agreed to move towards this target but not to a timetable for doing so. Levels of development assistance will continue to depend on our economic circumstances and other demands on public expenditure.

Mr. O'Brien: Is it not extremely disappointing that over the past 17 years overseas aid as a proportion of

GNP has fallen from 0.52 per cent., when the Labour Government left office, to 0.28 per cent. in 1995 and that it is still falling? When will the Government stop this decline in aid to overseas countries that need assistance? If our economy is as great as people are led to believe, why is the overseas aid budget falling as a proportion of GNP?

Dr. Fox: There were three points in the hon. Gentleman's question. First, in our next term we shall continue our policy of providing a reasonable proportion of GNP. Of course, the difference is that under a Conservative Government the GNP is worth a great deal more than it ever was under a Labour Government. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman betrays what Labour always betrays by such questions, which is that it looks only at state money and does not regard private flows as important. We exceed the UN target for private and public flows. When developing countries need money they do not care whether it comes from Governments, the private sector, the Commonwealth Development Corporation or anywhere else. Labour never seems to be able to accept that. What amazes me about the hon. Gentleman's question is that Labour has the gall to raise this matter once again in relation to the Government's spending plans, when the shadow Chancellor has told us that all our spending is exactly correct and that, should we suffer the dreadful misfortune of a Labour Government, they would do exactly the same. Either what the hon. Gentleman says is true, which is that Labour would raise the money and the shadow Chancellor's comments are completely laughable; or, the shadow Chancellor is correct and we have made the correct economic decisions for the past 17 years, increasing our GNP and therefore the money that we can give in aid.

Mr. Jessel: Can my hon. Friend confirm that a great deal of our development aid has been highly successful—for example, in India, where the economy is now growing well and the standards of living are improving every year? Can he also confirm that our development aid amounts to more than £2 billion a year, which works out at well over £100 per United Kingdom household; and that we would be able to contribute much more if we did not have to contribute through the Common Market as well?

Dr. Fox: Our aid is made through bilateral and multilateral programmes, and this year the Government have decided to protect our bilateral programme for the very reason that my hon. Friend gives, which is that we think that our bilateral programme is the best in the world. It gives value for money, it is not overly administered, as are many of the other multilateral programmes, and it gives a level of expertise that is simply unrivalled anywhere else. We have moved away from the bricks and mortar type of aid programme, which is still evident in many other countries, towards an expertise-based programme that provides long-term sustainability. We have much to be proud of.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Is the Minister aware that his original answer was almost word for word drawn from the 1974 Conservative party manifesto for the second election? While it is comforting to hear that today the Treasury Bench supports a former Prime Minister whereas only yesterday it was being extremely rude about him, does the Minister recognise that the percentage of aid is now 0.29 per cent. whereas in 1974 it was considerably higher? Is it right that 67 per cent. of today's aid should be tied? I challenge the Minister to adopt the Liberal Democrat conference resolution to reach the UN target within 10 years.

Dr. Fox: The hon. Lady knows more than I do about what prospectuses were like in 1974 as she was still supporting the Conservative manifesto at that time and I was 13 years old. We certainly believe that our aid is unsurpassed. It is not simply a question of what we give directly through state aid, but what is given by the private sector. Our private funds are flowing into developing countries and are making a real difference. There are two UN targets: not only for the proportion of GNP but for the combined flows. Only the United Kingdom and the Netherlands exceed that. Even the Liberal Democrats should recognise that.

Mr. Cunliffe: Does the Minister feel a sense of shame about the fact that in the Budget the Government cut 26p off a bottle of gin, and followed that with a £170 million reduction in overseas aid? That is a callous act, given the hundreds of thousands of starving families in Africa and Asia. Those people have to survive on a starvation diet and need vital aid. In those circumstances, to knock 26p off a bottle of spirits was a disgrace.

Dr. Fox: That would be true were it not for two things. First, we protected our bilateral programme in the Budget. We also said that should the multilateral aspect increase, it would be funded directly by the Treasury. Secondly, it is extraordinary to hear such remarks from a Labour Member, as the shadow Chancellor has already given his full backing to our Budget proposals.

EU Applicant Countries (Assistance)

31. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is taking via (a) the know-how fund and (b) other initiatives to assist EU applicant countries in respect of their economic and commercial structure.

[15552]

Dr. Liam Fox: The know-how fund supports a number of projects to help associated countries develop their economic and commercial structures. In addition, other multilateral programmes—notably, the EC PHARE programme—to which we contribute are active in that area.

Mr. Mackinlay: Although we appreciate the work that is done by the know-how fund and other agencies in promoting the training and interests of people in countries of central Europe that have applied for membership of the European Union, could we not do more? Will the Minister review with his colleagues in Government the opportunities for students of English from Visegrad countries to have greater access to the United Kingdom to learn English, so that they can return to develop their skills in the economies and commerce of those applicant countries? Will he consider a programme to ensure that a quality British newspaper is available in most further and higher education institutions in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia to whet the appetites of people who are very keen to identify with

the United Kingdom? All things being equal, they would prefer to trade with the United Kingdom than with our German competitors—

Madam Speaker: Order. That is long enough. The hon. Gentleman is very keen on central Europe. I know that he has a wonderful reputation there.

Dr. Fox: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thought that I had fallen asleep and had woken up during the Adjournment debate.

What the hon. Gentleman said was extremely important. I shall raise his concerns with the British Council, which is a prime example of the type of organisation that could deal with such matters. He is correct that we could do more for the associated countries. We have been working hard to improve access for central Europeans to the EU's agriculture market. It is fair to say that we reached a modest settlement last December. It would have been far more generous if some of our partners, especially France and Germany, had matched their fine words on enlargement with deeds.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

National Audit Office Staff

33. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission how many staff of the National Audit Office are employed in auditing expenditure relating to EU programmes. [15555]

Sir Terence Higgins (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): The National Audit Office audits the majority of expenditure in the United Kingdom that is funded from the European Community budget. That work is done as part of the Comptroller and Auditor General's responsibility to audit the appropriation accounts of the 10 UK Departments and agencies through which most of those funds pass. It is not possible to identify separately the staff effort related solely to European Union expenditure in auditing those accounts.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the wonderful work done by the Court of Auditors in Europe is largely ignored by all the institutions, does my right hon. Friend think that there would be some merit in our Audit Commission producing an annual report to show the British people how the £6 week that every family paid last year for the net contribution was used? Perhaps the Audit Commission should also provide a special report on last year's breakthrough, when the EU spent more on the destruction of food than it had ever spent before.

Sir Terence Higgins: As my hon. Friend well knows, the Comptroller and Auditor General does not have powers to examine expenditure under European schemes in other EU countries. He may be interested to note that the Comptroller and Auditor General reported to Parliament last week on the report, "The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: Common Agriculture Policy: Fraud and Irregularity", which examined aspects of the use made by European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund expenditure. He will also be interested to know that there are plans to publish in early March the annual report of the European Court of Auditors and its statement of assurance, which will summarise its recent reports. He and I have always had an intense interest in that, and I am sure that he will find that report of interest.

Mr. Llew Smith: Did the report to which the right hon. Gentleman refers reach a conclusion about the cost to the average family of the common agricultural policy? Were the auditors satisfied about the way in which the money was spent?

Sir Terence Higgins: The report was concerned with fraud and irregularity rather than the overall position, but I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman were to study it in detail he would see that it gives a broad perspective on that particular aspect of the common agricultural policy, which concerns many hon. Members.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Ministerial Accountability

14. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the extent to which the recommendations contained in the Scott report relating to ministerial accountability have been implemented. [15532]

Mr. Freeman: A full and careful consideration of the points on ministerial accountability made raised by Sir Richard Scott was set out in the Government's response to the recent report of the Public Service Select Committee. In line with the Committee's key recommendation, I expect to be in a position to bring before the House a formal resolution on ministerial accountability before the end of this Parliament.

Mrs. Clwyd: Have not the Government survived the Scott report by quite shamefully distorting its findings? Ministers whom Scott found guilty of deliberately deceiving Parliament are still in office and civil servants whom Scott criticised are either ambassadors to other countries or have been knighted. Now we are told that there will be no prosecutions, so who was responsible? Are not the electorate fed up with the Government, and do they not want to get rid of them as soon as possible?

Mr. Freeman: No. There was a full debate almost exactly a year ago in which the hon. Lady and I participated. It produced a clear result. As for the prosecution of civil servants, I can confirm that, with the exception of the Dunk case, no civil servant in any Department could be found to have acted in a manner that was not forthcoming and in accordance with Government policy. There was no intention to deceive, therefore no prosecutions followed.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Church Finances

36. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what projection of (a) church attendances and (b) contributions

per church member are used by the Church Commissioners in carrying out their responsibilities for budgeting in respect of church finances. [15558]

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The Commissioners do not make projections of church attendances or giving levels, although both factors are taken into account in the selective allocations made to dioceses for stipends. The proposals for changing the funding of clergy pensions will increase the cost of ministry that is borne by parishes, and the Commissioners have closely consulted dioceses on how quickly the cost of pension contributions can be absorbed.

Mr. Hughes: As pensions and other costs to the Church are likely to increase, will the Church Commissioners consider making a statement to the effect that they do not mind whether their congregations are traditional Anglican, old prayer book, or happy clappy, as long as there are loads of people in the church? The big test for the Church is that it should recruit people and welcome them whatever their style and volume of worship. If people can also give some money the Church should welcome that, but for heaven's sake let us not have divisions between one group in the Church saying that the old style is best and another saying that modern music is better. Let us get them all in—the more there are, the more successful the Church will be.

Mr. Alison: I am happy to give a general endorsement to the hon. Gentleman's approach. Issues of churchmanship should not have any bearing on the support that the Church gives or receives in respect of pensions for its retired servants. Nor should political factors carry significant weight; congregations can be not only happy clappy, but militant tendency and even national front. The politics of the pew are known to fellow members of the congregation and in more exalted circles.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my right hon. Friend pay tribute to the 801-year-old Lichfield cathedral, which yesterday evening held a service for Lichfield girl guides? I had the privilege to attend, but not in any capacity as a girl guide I hasten to add. The cathedral was packed and virtually every person present made a large contribution to its funds.

Mr. Alison: I am very glad to hear about the splendid performance of Lichfield cathedral. My hon. Friend and I have a personal friend among the cathedral staff. I know that the staff and the cathedral chapter are very much encouraged by my hon. Friend's assiduous and consistent support for their work.

Church Income

37. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on the Church Commissioners' projected income for the next financial year. [15559]

Mr. Alison: The Commissioners' projected income for 1997 is £125 million. The Commissioners' investment strategy is intended to enable the Commissioners' funds to grow in line with their liabilities over the long term to give stable and sustainable support to the Church.

Mr. Banks: That means, in effect, that they are almost bankrupt. The only way in which the Commissioners will increase income is by increasing the crowds going to church, which—referring to the question of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)—will be achieved by returning to traditional services. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with ex-Archbishop Runcie that people want to go to church for traditional services? They do not go to be felt up by someone sitting next to them on the pew but go to have the hand of God laid on them; they go for a good quaff from the communion cup and a good hymn. Perhaps the Church Commissioners should follow the example of football and bring in a few Italian stars and a bit of razzmatazz. That might get a few more people going and putting money on the plate.

Mr. Alison: The only trouble with the hon. Gentleman's bid for a traditional form of service in the Church of England is that it would unfortunately disbar his ever being invited to take part and deliver the sermon as he represents the shouty-louty tendency in the Church of England's approach. I would be very happy to have the shouty-louty tendency alongside the happy-clappy tendency, but the hon. Gentleman will have only traditional forms of service. By his own proscription, we shall, alas, be deprived of looking forward to his preachment in his local parish church, which we might enjoy.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Surely my right hon. Friend has got it entirely wrong. The shouty-louty hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) has demonstrated that he can be inspired and subdued by traditional services. It is only because such services have been abandoned all over the country that we have shouty louties.

Mr. Alison: I take my hon. Friend's point. There is a vast gulf between shouty louty, happy clappy and the more traditional forms of service—even those including what I suspect is my hon. Friend's heartfelt preference for the occasional use of Latin. Alas, the spectrum is not quite that wide. We shall, however, certainly try to embrace every other form, short of Latin.

Kent County Council

3.32 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It emerged in Kent at the weekend that members of the Labour-run county council want to spend £1 million on conferences, magazines and enjoying themselves on overseas visits. Can we not interrupt our business to discuss that important matter?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that that is not a point of order. It is an abuse of the House of Commons' time.

Opposition Day

[6TH ALLOTTED DAY]

National Health Service

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.33 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I beg to move,

That this House expresses its deep concern at the continuing deterioration of the National Health Service in the provision of both acute services and community care; notes with alarm the publication of the highest ever figures for people waiting for treatment; condemns Her Majesty's Government's continuing failure to rule out completely the commercialisation of General Practitioner services in its National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill *[Lords]*; believes that the imposition of the internal market system in the health service has fragmented decision-making, has set hospital against hospital and doctor against doctor, and has generated expensive and unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy; wants to see a transfer of resources from bureaucracy to patient care; salutes the dedication of staff at all levels within the Service who have held it together despite government policies, but expresses grave concern at the damaging impact those policies are having on staff morale; believes that government policy towards disabled people has failed to match the aspirations of disabled people themselves; believes that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 does not provide effective means for tackling disadvantage and discrimination affecting disabled people; calls for the establishment of a Disability Rights Commission to consider how best to achieve comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people; believes that under this Government community care has become a discredited term associated with inadequate care for those in need and inadequate protection for the general public; and confirms that the National Health Service is not safe in this Government's hands.

We have had a number of debates about the health service in the House in recent weeks, and I make no apology for the fact that many of them have been initiated by the Opposition. That policy area is at the very top of voters' lists of priorities as we approach the general election.

I want to focus on five specific areas of concern. My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) will deal later with questions relating to community care and disability. The first concern that I want to deal with is the general deterioration in the state of the national health service.

Last week, for example, the highest ever waiting list figures were published. The figures for the third quarter, from September to December 1996, show 1.096 million people waiting for operations, including a sharp increase of 46 per cent.—nearly a half—in those waiting for more than a year. We know that the winter is always difficult and that the influenza epidemic hit hard; but winter is not an entirely unpredictable event, and we must remember that the totals are the worst for any winter since records began.

In the Wirral—to concentrate on one specific area—there are 6,000 patients on the waiting lists. One in four patients in the Wirral wait for at least six months for hospital treatment. Two reports, as yet unpublished

[Mr. Chris Smith]

by the Secretary of State, have shown that both accident and emergency and intensive care services in the whole of the north-west are suffering serious problems.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): Given that the hon. Gentleman's party has claimed that £100 million can be saved by cutting back on bureaucrats in the health service, although it turns out that most of those bureaucrats are in fact doctors and senior nurses, will he match the Government's pledge to increase spending on the national health service year on year, or will he join the shadow Chancellor and say that Labour will not match that increased expenditure?

Mr. Smith: First, the reductions in bureaucracy that we envisage concern people who process invoices and operate the internal market, not doctors and nurses. Secondly, it would help if the Government themselves had matched their pledge on future funding for the health service. They have not done so; if the hon. Gentleman cares to look at the figures published by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he will find that the Government have already broken the pledge that the Prime Minister made at the Tory party conference.

I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is not concerned about what is happening in the north-west. Had he, for example, watched the BBC programme on 30 January, he would have known that it revealed that the report on accident and emergency services in the north-west said that the casualty service there was "in danger of collapsing", and he would have heard a consultant at Arrowe Park hospital describing overcrowded waiting rooms and people having to wait for up to seven hours to be treated as "all too familiar".

The hon. Gentleman might also be interested in a letter from the hospital to a patient in the Wirral who was waiting, on a referral from her general practitioner, for an orthopaedic consultation. Orthopaedics is of particular importance in the Wirral area and is in particular difficulty. The letter from the hospital states:

"I write to inform you that we are in receipt of a referral from your General Practitioner . . . I must inform you that currently our routine waiting time is approximately 154 weeks. An appointment date will be sent to you four weeks before the date of the clinic, and this may be at either Clatterbridge or Arrowe Park Hospital."

One hundred and fifty-four weeks for a consultation, and the Government have the gall to claim that the national health service is working well and is safe in their hands.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): What was the procedure in question? If the hon. Gentleman can tell me, he might sway me to support him.

Mr. Smith: The letter refers to a consultation, not a procedure. As far as I am aware, the consultation was for problems with the lady's hips. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should seek to defend the fact that someone seeking a consultation, who has been referred by her GP, has to wait for three years.

All round the country, the same stories are recurring week after week. People are waiting for longer and longer. Operations are being cancelled, sometimes at the last minute. Just last week, a man in Bedford hospital had his operation cancelled as he was being wheeled into the operating theatre. Patients are crowded in beds and on trolleys.

Mr. David Ashby (North–West Leicestershire) *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I wish to make some progress, and then I shall give way.

Last week, in Edgware hospital, a bed had to be shared by three patients taking turns, because of the overcrowding in the ward. General surgery is being cancelled up and down the country, but in many places only for the patients of non-fundholding GPs. If a patient has a fundholder as his GP, he is treated straight away.

Mr. Ashby: The hon. Gentleman is making generalised remarks, but we all know how many patients the national health service has to deal with. Can he tell the House the specific reason why the operation was cancelled in Bedford? Was it because the operating nurses had worked more time than they should and a 'flu outbreak meant that extra nurses could not come on duty? If that was the case, how can the health service deal with such occurrences?

Mr. Smith: That was not the reason for the cancellation. It was the second time that that man's operation was cancelled. He had a blocked aorta and he was 69 years old. The *Bedfordshire on Sunday* reported:

"Despite the urgency, both operations were cancelled because of a lack of intensive care beds."

That was the reason why the operation was cancelled, and it has not been denied. It shows a picture of a health service that is not able to respond to people's needs.

As well as the cancellation of operations, we see the cancellation of out-patient appointments. Again, up and down the country, out-patient appointments are cancelled—not for the patients of fundholders, but for the patients of non-fundholders. We now have a two-tier health service. People are being treated not according to need—that is what the NHS is supposed to be all about—but according to who their GP happens to be.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Last week, I received a letter from a constituent from Whitby, who told me how seriously ill he was. He expressed the wish that the Labour party should not abolish GP fundholding, as he would not be alive today if GP fundholding had not existed. What will the hon. Gentleman say to that constituent in three months' time if he is the Secretary of State for Health and aims to abolish GP fundholding?

Mr. Smith: I would say to the hon. Gentleman's constituent that the NHS should respond to anyone with a life-threatening illness of any kind and that he should be treated effectively, whether his GP is a fundholder or not.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The principle that the hon. Gentleman has enunciated is precisely that which is contained in guidance to the health service today. He has just specifically and in terms endorsed the Government's policy.

Mr. Smith: Perhaps the Secretary of State will then endorse that principle not just for life-threatening conditions, but for other forms of surgery and out-patient

appointments. Patients should receive treatment and consultation according to need—not according to who their GP happens to be. Will he endorse that principle?

Mr. Dorrell: I am happy to endorse the principle of a health service led by the needs of individual patients, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to do so. Where the needs of GPs' individual patients are different, GPs should have a powerful voice in determining what those needs are.

Mr. Smith: In that case, will the Secretary of State tell us why Lincoln county hospital, for example, sent letters two months ago just to non-fundholding GPs, to cancel all out-patient appointments for the rest of the financial year? Why are their patients treated differently from the patients of other GPs? That breaches the principle that the Secretary of State claims to uphold.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way again, but perhaps he would like to get on with his own speech. The circumstances that he has just set out allow individual GPs to decide which health care facilities reflect the interests of their patients, and GPs have been empowered to ensure that the service delivered to their patients reflects their needs. That is the principle of fundholding, and it is a principle which, in my view, should determine the empowerment of GPs throughout the health service. It is a principle that the hon. Gentleman espouses, from time to time. Is he now walking away from it?

Mr. Smith: The Secretary of State has just endorsed a two-tier health service, and he appears to be proud of the fact that the health service does not operate on the basis of the needs of patients. While the health service struggles under the most intense pressure to meet the needs of patients, he sails serenely on, pretending that everything is absolutely fine, and spending his time running—rather too obviously—for the Tory party leadership, instead of addressing the real issues and problems affecting the health service.

The second issue that I want to raise, which is related, is what happens to elderly patients who go into hospital for treatment and then face the prospect of either staying in hospital to recover—and being labelled as bed blockers—or being sent home too early to an unsupported environment where they will be unable to recover properly. Again, that is an issue of concern in the Wirral. Clatterbridge hospital has a rehabilitation unit that provides excellent care, but it is not able to cope with the needs of elderly patients who have had a course of acute treatment and need somewhere to recover. That problem affects not only the Wirral—important though it is for that area, which has a large number of elderly citizens—but every part of the country.

Often, an elderly patient who has been sent home too early cannot recover properly, with the inevitable result that four or five weeks later, he or she ends up back in hospital. That is wonderful for the Government's statistics, because that patient counts as two finished consultant episodes. When Ministers make speeches, they claim that that is two patients being treated, but it is not—it is one person, who has not had a good and proper full course of care and treatment from the NHS. That is why the proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) and I, for the development of a recuperation service precisely to help elderly patients to recover properly for a week or two following acute treatment, before being sent home, are so important.

Mr. Ashby: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that elderly patients often recover best in their home surroundings, among the people they know and their relatives? Does he accept that in two cases in my constituency—both close friends of mine—the elderly person was sent home, got fantastic treatment and recovered well as a result? Why is he running down the health service in that way, when it is doing extremely well?

Mr. Smith: Of course, if it is possible for an elderly person to return home and to be supported by district nurses—the support that is available from the NHS—and family and friends, who have to be on call to help in such circumstances, that is the best possible place for that person to recuperate, but it may well not be possible for someone to have such support. Some people may not have family and friends on hand to give that sort of support and care. For those in that position, who may well be sent home too early and may not be supported properly, the recuperation service that we envisage would be of enormous benefit.

The third issue is the way in which the Government are seeking to conceal the truth about what is happening in the NHS. Pretending that there is no problem is one thing, but massaging the presentation of the facts to the public is quite another. Recently, a memorandum from the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS trust let the cat out of the bag. I suspect that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy), who is here with us, may have a word or two to say about that later. This is a briefing note sent round the hospital by the hospital, presumably as an instruction to those working in it. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State appears to wish that that note was not being presented to the House and I am not surprised, because the memorandum says:

"The region"—

that is, the region of the national health service executive run by the Secretary of the State—

"have indicated that the figure of 329 declared by the Trust in November is very high"—

that is, the figure on the waiting list. The region has suggested

"a judicious elimination of TCI patients"—

that is, patients to come in—

"This has been carried out from the end of the second quarter."

It is deliberately getting rid of figures from the list, to make the list look smaller. Clearly, the Government are up to a judicious elimination of waiting list figures.

When the Government say that they are treating more patients than ever before, we know that many of those cases involve two or three consultant episodes with the same person. The Government say that the waiting list figures look wonderful, but we know that they are massaging the figures. We are learning rapidly that we cannot trust the Government on information about what is happening in the health service.

[Mr. Smith]

It does not stop there. A memorandum from the United Leeds teaching hospital, about answering the telephone to patients, states:

"As you know, some purchasers have asked us to slow down the rate at which we treat certain patients. I anticipate that this may cause problems if these patients ring you and press for a date . . . In these cases, please use the following reply to patients, which has been agreed with"—

I presume that the name given is that of the relevant officer. It continues:

"I suggest you keep it by the phone so you are never caught off guard. Do not tell patients that purchasers have asked us to slow down the rate at which we treat patients—for obvious reasons."

The memorandum then gives the script that has to be used. Note that this is happening because the purchasers have asked for the rate to be slowed down. The script to be used for the public runs:

"There has been an increase in the number of emergency cases this year which has taken the health authorities by surprise and has put a strain on their finances.

Consequently, they have asked us to defer any non-urgent cases, until later in the year."

It is a case of, "Do not tell them that it is the market system that is the problem; tell them that it is unexpected emergency cases." That is another example of people being told a story that is completely different from reality.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): I am a Leeds Member with a general practitioner who has received notices about not being able to get emergency treatment. Does my hon. Friend agree that the real cause is the shortage of funds experienced by both Leeds general infirmary and the health authority, and that the funding formula that the Secretary of State has chosen means that cities such as Leeds are deprived of funds? That is why LGI cut beds to take emergencies.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend acutely observes that there are important issues that relate to the nature of the funding formula that should be addressed. However, he must bear it in mind that the health service wastes hand over fist money that could be better devoted to patient care—on paperwork, invoicing and the patient bureaucracy associated with the internal market.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No. I shall make progress for the time being.

We know that instructions are being given in hospital after hospital, to delay payments to contractors and creditors until the next financial year. They are verbal instructions in virtually every case, but they are instructions none the less. Hospitals delay payments to suppliers and contractors, to make their figures for the current financial year look better. So much for the party of small business that is running the Government at the moment.

As a result of what is happening now, the future is being mortgaged, because the bills will have to be picked up in the next financial year. The health authorities and the trusts already face combined deficits of £215 million at the end of this financial year. They will have to be paid off in the course of the next financial year, and then the costs for that year will have to be met, even before inflation is taken into account. They are spending next year's money to overcome this year's problems. The reason for that, of course, is that there is an election coming up and the Government do not want to reveal the true state of affairs.

What about the curious case of ministerial assertions on cancer treatment? My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich raised that issue during Health questions last week, when she asked the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), what was happening about waiting times and waiting lists for cancer treatment. The Under-Secretary replied clearly and specifically:

"no one waits for cancer treatment unless the doctor makes a clinical decision to that effect".—[*Official Report*, 18 February 1997; Vol. 290, c. 732.]

How does one square that with the figures that the Department of Health has published—figures that it must publish? The latest available figures, for 1994-95, show that in England 42 per cent. of patients waited for more than 30 days for treatment of all types of cancer. If one looks at the one area for which detailed figures on the number of patients treated are available—those for South East Thames health authority—one discovers that a total of 1,070 patients were waiting for treatment for more than three months, as at 1 April. That is what is happening in one region alone.

We know from individual cases that treatment has been delayed not just for clinical reasons, by a doctor who decides that someone should wait longer for treatment. The Under-Secretary told the House that no one has to wait unless there are such clinical reasons, but we know that 42 per cent. of cancer patients are waiting for more than 30 days for surgery. That is according to figures published by his own Department. That shows that the Government are failing to offer accurate information on the current state of affairs.

We have a Government who are massaging the waiting time figures; giving misleading advice to the public; deliberately encouraging trusts to default on payments; and telling us that no cancer patient has to wait for surgery, when that is not so. That is what the Government are busy doing at the moment.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No. I have given way rather a lot and I want to make some progress.

The fourth issue that I wish to discuss is morale. The health service is staffed by dedicated people at all levels. They have held the service together during the years in which the Government have run it down and introduced the internal market. They work under intense pressure. They grieve at the way in which the public service that they thought they had joined has been turned into a series of competing businesses.

The national turnover rates of registered nurses have risen from 13 per cent. in 1992-93 to 22 per cent. in 1995-96. Nearly a quarter of all NHS nurses are changing their jobs in the course of a year. Many trusts are now running more than 1,000 shifts of temporary nursing staff every week. The NHS is spending £1 million every three

weeks on advertisements to recruit extra nurses into the service. Some 14,000 registered nurses have had to have time off in the recent past because of back injuries. There is a crisis in recruitment. The number of qualified nurses joining the NHS stands at a quarter of that 10 years ago.

The crisis in recruitment and morale applies not just to nurses, but right the way through the national health service. We need a consistent effort to motivate and inspire staff—giving them better and more flexible career patterns, improving the safety of their working environment, ending the gagging clauses that prevent them from speaking out when they think that something is going wrong, and restoring the ethos of a public service in the NHS, which is what they thought they had joined in the first place. In order to achieve that, we need an end to the internal market in the NHS. The Government are going in precisely the wrong direction, which brings me to my fifth theme: the Government's determination to commercialise the health service.

The National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill is currently passing through the House. We shall leave aside the Government's sheer incompetence. It was supposed to be the Bill in which the Secretary of State had such great pride when he presented it to the House. On the eve of the debate on Report in another place, the Government tabled 90 amendments, most of them drafting amendments to put right mistakes that they had made in the original drafting. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich, who leads so ably for the Opposition in Committee, has told me that last Friday the Government tabled another 29 drafting amendments, to try to correct further mistakes that they had made in the original Bill.

However, we should leave all that on one side and instead consider the Government's proposals to commercialise GP services. When the Bill first emerged, we rightly said that it enabled private companies to employ GPs. The Opposition said clearly that that was unacceptable, because it destroyed the fundamental relationship between doctor and patient. At that stage, the Government were busy defending that principle.

In an interview with *Pulse* magazine on 25 January, the Secretary of State said:

"If it is a difficult area and a service cannot be provided using other routes, commercial enterprise may offer a solution."

In another place, Baroness Cumberlege, who speaks for the Government on health matters, was even more explicit. On 17 December she told the other place:

"We are serious about tackling these difficulties and do not want to rule out any sensible opportunities, including a GP being employed by a commercial organisation."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 December 1996; Vol. 576, c. 1403.]

Clearly, in December and January the Government were fully signed up to the principle of the commercial employment of GPs.

It was not just the Opposition, but the entire medical profession, who were saying that that was unacceptable. In the face of concerted opposition, the Government finally decided to back down. Last week, in the debate on the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill, we witnessed the Government's first climbdown. The Secretary of State told us that the Bill would be changed, to ensure that only a member of the NHS family could employ GPs.

The Government tabled a new clause. It included "an NHS employee" as a member of the NHS family, and "NHS employee" was defined as

"an individual who, in connection with the provision of services in the health service, is employed (or engaged under a contract for services) by an NHS trust or a medical practitioner".

It did not take a genius to spot within two minutes the fact that that definition of a member of the NHS family could include anyone from Boots to Rentokil, which are indeed contracted to the NHS for the provision of services during routine work.

Therefore, the Government said that they realised that they had made a mistake, and that they would make a second climbdown; they would further reduce the scope. However, even after removing that provision from the Bill, the Government are still restricting the NHS family provision to the running of a pilot scheme. They do not restrict the commercialisation proposals in any other form of employment of GPs.

What the Government are about in the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill—we have yet to see whether they will put even that right in further amendments—is a constant retreat from their original position, continuously having in mind that they want to allow commercial employment of GPs. Unless the Government rule out completely, irrevocably and without a shadow of a doubt the possibility of commercial employment, the possibility of GPs teaming up with a commercial company, entering into a financial relationship, and destroying in the process the relationship between doctor and patient, we shall not be minded to support them.

The Government are intent on commercialising the health service in other ways. They are developing several private finance initiative schemes for the development of new hospitals. Until now, we had always thought that the PFI was only about the building and running of ancillary services in hospitals—that the Government were not interested in privatising the clinical services in hospitals. We thought that the Stonehaven project, for which the Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible—

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I have always been suspicious of the Government. I thought that that was always their intention. My hon. Friend is too trusting.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend says that he was always suspicious of them. I was giving one or two benefits of the doubt to the Government, but I know better now and I shall not do so again.

Mr. Mackinlay: No more Mr. Nice Guy.

Mr. Smith: I had thought that the Secretary of State for Scotland was isolated in the Government in pushing the Stonehaven scheme, which privatises clinical services as well as everything else in the hospital. Then we began to discover that other things were happening. We are now being told that the PFI deal for the building of the Stonegrove extension to the Royal Hallamshire hospital in Sheffield will depend on including, as part of the package, the privatisation of radiology and pathology.

[Mr. Smith]

We discovered more at last week's meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) pressed the Minister of State, Scottish Office on the PFI. He asked:

"Will the Government categorically rule out, as a manifesto pledge, any PFI that involves the privatisation of clinical services?"

The Minister answered as follows:

"No, I will not go as far as that. I entirely rule out privatisation. All services must be free at the point of delivery, but if there is strong local support, each case must, of course, be considered on its merits."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 17 February 1997; c. 10.]

The Minister was thus not ruling out the privatisation of clinical services: that is a matter for local decision, he said.

Now the Secretary of State for Health has confirmed as much. He has written me a letter, which I received just this afternoon. I had put it to him that the Government have always in the past claimed that they do not approve of the privatisation of clinical services, yet now the Scottish Office says that it does so approve. Is there not, I asked, a problem here? The Secretary of State wrote saying that there is no problem—we are all in agreement. His letter says:

"It is not part of the Government's general policy to transfer the delivery of NHS clinical services into the private sector".

The right hon. Gentleman goes on to quote his speech to the Royal College of Physicians, in which he said that NHS trusts would continue to be

"the direct employer of clinical staff in the overwhelming majority of cases".

In other words, the Secretary of State for Health, the Scottish Office and the whole Government are perfectly happy for privatised clinical services to be provided by doctors and nurses in the NHS in some circumstances.

The Opposition do not accept that principle. The Secretary of State's letter went on to say that that will happen only if

"local clinicians favour such a move".

It should not be up to local clinicians; the people should make the decision about whether services should be provided in the public sector and by the national health service. The people of this country do not want their doctors and nurses to be employed by private companies; they want them employed by the national health service. If the Government want that to be a key dividing line between them and us in the coming general election, we shall be delighted to take them on.

The Government are intent on pursuing their policies of an internal market in the health service. It is a market that sets hospital against hospital and doctor against doctor. It fragments decision making in the service; it creates two tiers of service, one for those who have and one for those who have not. It distorts the clinical judgment of doctors and other health care professionals. If, heaven forbid, the Government were re-elected, their real agenda—the commercialisation of primary care, the privatisation of at least some clinical services, the end of the national health service as we know it—would be put into effect.

That is not a vision shared by the people of Britain. They share our vision—[HON. MEMBERS: "What is it?"]—of a health service restored as a public sector service, not run as a private business. It will take a Labour Government to rescue the NHS and to restore that vision to our country.

4.18 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"is committed to the National Health Service as a public service, promoting health and providing high-quality care more quickly than ever before; expresses its support for the continuing development of primary care and community health services; welcomes the Government's commitment to a growing budget for the National Health Service throughout the next five years; supports the Government's policies to increase independence, choice and opportunities for people with disabilities; and welcomes the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as a landmark in legislation for disabled people, of which there is no equal in the European Union."

I thank the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) for once again drawing attention to the vacuum which substitutes for Labour's health policy. The hon. Gentleman is developing a taste for masochism. He seems to enjoy advertising his party's nakedness, exposing himself and his right hon. and hon. Friends to ridicule because they are unable or unwilling to evolve anything that remotely resembles a policy for the future of the national health service.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dorrell: I have hardly reached the end of my third sentence, but it is always a pleasure to give way to the hon. Gentleman: he is at least more fun to listen to than his hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury.

Mr. Faulds: It is not a question of fun. This is a serious debate about a serious matter. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that what he has just read was not written before he heard my hon. Friend's speech?

Mr. Dorrell: I was writing, as the hon. Gentleman may have observed, during the speech of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. I concede that I would have taken bets that the introduction to my speech would have fitted almost any speech that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury was likely to deliver.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury is responsible for developing a health policy for the Labour party, but in every health debate in the House he seems to glory in a demonstration that he has no health policy at all; worse, in every debate he makes it clearer that he is not interested in health policy.

Whenever the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury is asked a question about what he would do, he avoids it. Whenever he is challenged to set out a course for the future, he simply bypasses the question. When my hon. Friend the Minister for Health, who is to reply to the debate, asked towards the end of the hon. Gentleman's speech what he would offer as an alternative vision for the future of the national health service, the total length of the hon. Gentleman's answer to that question was 12 seconds.

Again today, we heard the familiar mix from the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury: anecdotes of individual cases told in the language of half-truth and innuendo, covered with a cloak of righteous indignation. Today, he seemed short even of anecdotes of individual cases, so he filled in time with stories of scraps of paper alongside telephones. He made the speech that he would have made in Committee on the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill, if he had been on the Committee. Then he went straight from five themes to peroration, without pausing to reflect on the future of the health service.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Secretary of State clarify one point? I notice that the hon. Members for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst) and for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) are not in their places this afternoon. They stuck out to maintain an accident and emergency department at Edgware hospital. They were faced with their Conservative Associations being dissolved and with being deselected. What did the Secretary of State give them, or offer them as reassurance? They claim that the accident and emergency department at Edgware will remain. Is that true? What was the deal that they hatched, or was it merely a cosmetic exercise to get the Tory party over some difficulty in London?

Mr. Dorrell: The position in Edgware has been set out repeatedly by the health authority. I will set out to the hon. Gentleman and the House the three developments that were agreed by the health authority following discussions with all the local Members of Parliament. They concerned a low-risk birth unit, the development of a casualty department involving the presence of GPs and GP-type doctors, and the provision of GP-access beds. Those were the arrangements set out by the health authority after its meeting last September. If the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) was genuinely interested in health in Edgware, rather than in making silly party political points, he would know that, because it is on the public record. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman was interested in health, rather than in silly party political points, he could find all that out for himself by looking at the records of the health authority.

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): Can the Secretary of State tell me what a GP-type doctor is? Is it similar to a GP doctor? Perhaps he can explain.

Mr. Dorrell: A GP-type doctor is a doctor who has qualifications similar to those of a GP. I should have thought that was a fairly straightforward definition.

Once again, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury resorted to his familiar technique to avoid addressing the issues that confront the future of the hospital service. When will we hear from Labour Front Benchers any recognition of the achievements of the hospital service over the past quarter of a century? When will we hear any constructive ideas from Labour Front Benchers for the development of the hospital service under an alternative Government, if we were ever misguided enough to elect one?

Let me set out the achievements of the hospital service in recent years. The treatment of emergencies is up by 20 per cent. over the past four years, and the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury might have done well to refer to that. He might also have recognised that the trend for increasing the provision of emergency services in our hospitals—a trend that has delivered a 20 per cent. growth rate over four years—continues into the current year with a growth rate of a further 4 per cent. in the first half of this year.

It is true that the hospital service is a system under stress. The hon. Gentleman repeatedly says that I seek to suggest that the health service has no problems. Of course I never suggest that. The winter pressures that the NHS emergency services face each and every year place stress on the health service, and this year is no exception. This year, as every other year, as emergency service pressures reach their peak, some non-urgent operations were delayed in order to treat the most urgent cases first in our hospitals. Does the hon. Gentleman disagree with that principle? If he does, let him come to the Dispatch Box and say so.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Is it not also the case that a number of trusts undertook the bulk of their non-elective surgery in the summer and autumn months last year to prepare for the winter emergencies? Inevitably, therefore, waiting lists will now rise from a low point last summer.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right to say that every well-run hospital seeks to get ahead of its work load in the summer months to make room for the emergency surge that comes every winter. It is also true to say that hospitals have been planning for and expecting the surge in emergency demand that comes in the winter months. That is why, the last time we had a health debate—not five weeks ago—I referred to the fact that we had been opening extra short-term beds during the winter to accommodate the extra demands on the health service at that time of year.

As I said five weeks ago, to accommodate the short-term peaks in emergency demand that come every year at that time of year, Dartford opened an extra 33 beds; Ashford, an extra 40 beds; St. Helier, an extra 35 beds; Poole, an extra 18 beds; Derriford, an extra 11 beds; Plymouth, an extra 35 beds; Rotherham, an extra 33 beds; Doncaster, an extra 38 beds; Mansfield, an extra 28 beds; Burton, an extra 16 beds; and the North West region as a whole opened an extra 200 beds.

The overwhelming picture of the NHS this winter has been, first, of professional staff—we did not hear much from the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury recognising the contribution and commitment of professional staff in the NHS—delivering high-quality care under pressure in the hospital service. We have also seen the results of the much-maligned NHS management system preparing for winter pressures to ensure that those demands are met. It suits the hon. Gentleman never to acknowledge that this year we have seen the results of the Government's political commitment to ensure that the resources and support are there to back the delivery of needs-led health care throughout the NHS.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): The Secretary of State is right to applaud the efforts of the professional, medical, nursing and all the other support staff in the health service—not forgetting the managers. However, will he deal with the question of the waiting list figures that were published last week? His claims about

[Mrs. Jane Kennedy]

the performance of the health service are based on those figures. Will he answer a direct question? The Royal Liverpool university hospital has declared that 299 patients waited longer than 12 months for treatment. Does that figure exclude patients in ophthalmology, orthopaedics and ear, nose and throat, or does it include all patients waiting for treatment, irrespective of where they live? The memorandum, a copy of which the Health Secretary has, clearly says that not all such patients are declared. One consultant at the Royal has informed Members of Parliament that, in his specialty, more people wait longer than 12 months than has been declared as a total for that hospital.

Mr. Dorrell: The North West region has made it clear, as, indeed, has the hospital, that the published figures are intended to be a full and complete statement of the number of people on the waiting list for out-patient, in-patient and day-case care. The figures were collected as a straightforward public service by people who have no political commitment to the Government, by people working as public servants. Those are the people whom the hon. Members for Islington, South and Finsbury and for Liverpool, Broad Green (Mrs. Kennedy) are attacking—public servants working within the national health service, setting out information about the people who are waiting for non-urgent care in the national health service.

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I give way to the hon. Gentleman. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury seemed to be so terrified of the Liberal Democrat spokesman that he refused to give way to him, but I am more than happy to do so.

Mr. Hughes: If the Secretary of State sets store by the statistics as accurate, will he confirm that they show three things? First, for the first time since they were produced in this form nearly 10 years ago, more than 1 million people are now on the waiting list; secondly, the same statistics, produced by a method which he attests is accurate, show that in the North West region, which includes the Wirral, more than 4,000 people—the highest number ever—are on the waiting list; and, thirdly, in my district, south London, which is part of South Thames region, 10,000 extra people went on to the waiting list between the last quarter and December last year. It is a record nationally. If those figures are correct, what will the Secretary of State do to bring them down, not in the future but in the next quarter, so that people waiting today have some prospect of being treated—even within the patients charter limits?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall deal with waiting lists now. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the total number of people on the waiting list, in the figures published last week, is higher than it has been. What is also true is that the number of patients treated in the health service is higher than it has ever been. What matters to a patient on the waiting list is not how many other people are on the waiting list but the time he or she will have to spend on the waiting list.

The key point of which the hon. Gentleman and the House should take account is that the average time spent on a waiting list has fallen from nine months five years ago to an average of four months now. The position on waiting lists and waiting times is that the performance of the health service has improved. We have dramatically reduced the number of long waits, about which I shall talk later, and more than halved the average time that a patient spends on the waiting list.

Let us now talk about the non-emergency service, the elective work load of the hospital service. The emergency services that I have been talking of thus far account for less than half the total load on the hospital service in terms of finished consultant episodes. The other half is the elective work load, which has increased by 30 per cent. over the past four years. In that period, the emergency service work load has increased by 20 per cent.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury spoke at length about waiting lists. He appears to believe that a simple repetition of the statistics and the fact that waiting list totals are rising are substitutes for thought about what to do about them. In fact, every time he opens his mouth about waiting lists, he reveals how little he understands the real issues that confront hospital managers.

Let me set out the facts of the waiting lists issue. As I have said, roughly half of all cases treated in NHS hospitals are urgent or emergency cases and are treated immediately. The other half go on to a waiting list. The waiting list performance, as I said in answer to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, has improved dramatically. Ten years ago, 200,000 people were on waiting on lists for more than a year. In 1979, 185,000 people had been on the waiting list for more than a year. That was our inheritance from the Labour party. Through the 1980s, the figure hovered at plus or minus 200,000. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister insisted, through the patients charter, that we address the issue of long waits in the NHS and that figure has been reduced to 22,000. It is down from the 185,000 that we inherited and the average of 200,000 through the 1980s to 22,000 in the figures that were published last week.

The superficiality of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury is revealed by the fact that he said that the figure had increased from 15,000 to 22,000 and called it a 46 per cent. increase. Arithmetically that is correct, but he made no reference at all to the fact that the true comparison is with the 200,000 people who were waiting throughout the 1980s and, indeed, the late 1970s, and the 22,000 who are waiting now. The issue is the waiting time, but the hon. Gentleman consistently prefers to avoid discussing that.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Presumably the speed with which we were able to make improvements through the 1980s was not helped by the cancellation of the hospital building contracts towards the end of the Labour Government. The whole health programme was put seriously behind when their economic policy ended in such chaos.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend is right, and I shall speak later about the importance of a proper capital investment programme in the health service, an issue that

the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury did not touch on in his speech, which was supposed to be about health policy.

Mr. Gunnell *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I should like to make some more progress and then I shall give way.

If Labour cannot say anything intelligent about waiting lists, let us move to another fundamental issue which my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) raised in his intervention. Health care is highly capital intensive. The facilities by which hospital care is delivered are expensive, and furthermore the shape of health care is changing quickly. That means that the NHS appetite for capital investment is considerable. Although there was a huge increase in the capital investment programme through the 1980s, reversing the 28 per cent. cut in capital that the Labour Government imposed in the 1970s, too many hospitals are still caught trying to deliver 21st-century health care in 19th-century buildings.

The issue confronting the health service, which the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury refuses ever to confront, is how to ensure a sufficient capital flow to keep the capital stock up to date so that we can deliver the best high-quality and efficient health care to our patients. That is why the Government have introduced the private finance initiative.

Mr. Chris Smith *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I shall shortly give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The PFI was introduced to allow the health service to escape from the capital trap. Since we started it, we have approved 71 schemes to a total value of £626 million. We have signed contracts for 44 of those 71 schemes to a total value of £432 million. There remain 22 schemes which have been approved in principle and for which approved bidders have been selected. The total value of those schemes is £1.7 billion.

I have not yet given way to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, but when I do, I hope that he will take advantage of his intervention to set out Labour's policy for the people of Bishop Auckland, Calderdale, Carlisle, Gloucester, Greenwich, Hereford, north Durham, Bexley, Rochdale and Coventry and other places who are on the list and have preferred bidders under the PFI and the realistic opportunity of seeing the needs of their local health service for capital investment met. Labour's position on the PFI is one of the great unsolved riddles of the hon. Gentleman's speeches. Is he in favour of delivering modern hospital care to those communities? I give way to the hon. Gentleman to give him an opportunity to answer.

Mr. Smith: The short answer to the right hon. Gentleman's final question is yes. Will he answer two questions? First, will he confirm that, within the overall national health service budget, he has cut the capital budget for this year and next year by one third? Secondly, will he also confirm that the new Norfolk and Norwich hospital was first announced by his predecessor in 1990, but not a single brick has yet been laid?

Mr. Dorrell: I have already made it clear that the PFI was introduced to increase and improve the quality of capital investment available for the national health service.

The hon. Gentleman has taken to writing letters to some of my hon. Friends and to Labour parliamentary candidates, copies of which I have seen. In those letters, he says:

"Where a contract has not been signed by the time we come into office"—

I hope that that never happens—

"we will be seeking urgent ways of speeding up the process."

Labour has had 18 years: is it not time it produced just one proposal?

I give way to the hon. Gentleman once more, so that he can come to the Dispatch Box and set out one proposal that will speed up the PFI. I ask for one proposal. If he cannot do that, those letters to my hon. Friends, like the one he wrote to the Labour parliamentary candidate in Worcester, are a sham. What programme does the hon. Gentleman offer under the PFI to speed up hospital projects in the communities to which I referred? Will he come to the Dispatch Box and tell us? I give way to him. What is his idea? He writes letters to Labour candidates, to my hon. Friends and to anyone who will listen promising that Labour will speed up the PFI. I give way to him. I look forward to hearing about those ideas.

Mr. Smith: I ask the Secretary of State to answer the two questions which I posed to him, and to which he has not yet replied. He should stop trying to blame the Opposition for the shambles on the PFI that the Government have created. The Government have promised hospital after hospital up and down the country, but have not delivered on their promises.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman grossly misunderstands me. I do not want to hold him responsible for the Government's record; I want to hold him responsible for Labour's policy. He promised to speed up the PFI. How does he intend to do that? That is a simple question. He made that promise to his own supporters and to Conservative Members. How will he deliver that pledge? The House will draw its own conclusion from the fact that the hon. Gentleman has set out no proposals. It is empty rhetoric: he has not the beginnings of a shred of an idea of how he will deliver his pledge.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): I am the recipient of one of the letters from the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) to which my right hon. Friend referred. The hon. Gentleman refers to his anger at the delays in the rebuilding of Barnet hospital caused by the Government's approach to PFI. Is my right hon. Friend aware that Barnet hospital was built in 1939, and it was to be rebuilt at the end of the last world war? The Labour party was in office in the 1940s, 1960s and 1970s, but it never rebuilt that hospital.

Mr. Dorrell: I am aware of that. I am also aware that, under this Government, phase 1A of the rebuilding of Barnet hospital is currently taking place, and will improve hospital care for the people of that part of London. I am further aware that the Government introduced the PFI, which is the basis on which phase 1B will go ahead. The predecessor of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury used to describe the PFI not as the private finance initiative but as the privatisation initiative. I notice

[Mr. Dorrell]

that the hon. Gentleman is rather more circumspect about what he says, even though he has no idea of what he would do about it.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South–East): The Secretary of State mentioned Coventry when he gave his catalogue of PFIs. What will happen to the Coventry and Warwickshire hospital, because there has been an element of doubt, about which I have written to the Secretary of State? What is the state of the PFI for the Walsgrave hospital?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about the Coventry and Warwickshire hospital. Walsgrave hospital is one of the projects for which we have a preferred bidder. We are seeking to put in place a plan to replace the existing hospital. It is quite a modern hospital, but it does not provide an efficient use of resources. The private finance option for Walsgrave hospital shows the merits of the private finance approach. Instead of carping from the sidelines, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury would do well to learn from that approach.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): My constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) are extremely keen for the excellent PFI scheme to reconstruct the West Middlesex university hospital to go ahead without delay. My right hon. Friend and his colleagues have been giving us all the help that they can. However, our constituents will be extremely unimpressed when we tell them that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, having boasted that he would speed up PFI schemes, was completely unable to say what he would do to achieve that when he was challenged to do so by my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. His constituents will feel the same as those of many other right hon. and hon. Friends around the country. It will be within the memory of those who regularly attend these debates that, on the last occasion we discussed the health service, I referred to the people of Worcester, which is my home town. They are in the same position as my hon. Friend's constituents. The hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) came to Worcester after an earlier visit by the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who said that, if the deal for the hospital there had not been signed by election day, it would be put on ice. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury had to send his hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich—he has apparently forgotten about it—to dig the right hon. Member for Livingston out of the hole into which he had dug himself. The right hon. Gentleman was able to sit on proposals to privatise the Tote, but the citizens of Worcester will be relieved to know that he failed to sit on their plans for a new hospital.

Mr. Gunnell *rose—*

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South) *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: No, I shall move on.

That is not the only threat that the Labour poses to the future of the national health service. The biggest threat hanging over the health service is the threat of another round of bureaucratic change, and the costs that that will entail. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury made a speech on 3 December, in which he set out his proposals for another round of management change. That speech has rightly been widely reported as threatening real damage to and bureaucratic upheaval in the health service. He began by saying:

"Everyone from all parts of the health service tells us that the last thing they want is for us to throw everything up in the air again and try to catch the pieces. 'No more major upheavals, please', they tell us. I have heard that message."

The hon. Gentleman may have heard it, but about four pages later he made it absolutely clear that he would ignore it completely. He went on to say:

"So it is our intention that the strategic planning functions of health authorities and the health care provider responsibilities of hospitals should remain, but the decisions about what treatment to organise on behalf of patients should be drawn together in local GP-led commissioning groups."

The hon. Gentleman went straight on from his promise of stability to set out a new blueprint for the reorganisation of the purchasing function of the national health service. He continued:

"Within each current health authority area, there might therefore be between five and 15 commissioning groups."

Each area has one health authority—one bureaucracy. The hon. Gentleman is now threatening between five and 15 new bureaucracies in every health authority area.

The hon. Gentleman continued:

"The health authority would delegate to each local GP group a comprehensive budget covering all aspects of care"—

here is the rub—

"The commissioning group would of course have to have access to the appropriate level of management support."

Of course it would. The hon. Gentleman's speech sets out a blueprint that delegates the main purchaser function from 100 health authorities to 500 new bureaucracies. It is abundantly clear that the new version of purchaser-provider would maintain the internal market, but instead of having 100 health authorities and many GPs acting as purchasers, the hon. Gentleman proposes that there should be 500 bureaucracies all operating in the internal market.

As the *Financial Times* reported the day after his speech:

"Labour claims this creation will reduce bureaucracy and increase value for money. What it threatens to do is precisely the opposite: to stifle innovation, produce indecision and replace larger purchasing units with less efficient smaller ones."

Those are not my words. They are a summary by the *Financial Times* of the hon. Gentleman's proposal to impose a new bureaucratic cost on the health service in contravention of exactly the principle that he enunciated at the start of his speech—that the health service needs a period of stability.

Mr. Chris Smith: First, will the Secretary of State confirm that the last five minutes of his speech have proved comprehensively that his earlier charge that the Labour party has no health policy is untrue? Secondly, will he address what the *Health Service Journal* said about that speech—that our proposals were coherent and credible?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall now address what the Royal College of Nursing said about it:

"We are appalled that Labour has failed to recognise nursing's central role in primary health care."

The hon. Gentleman must be the first Labour health spokesman in history to provoke such an unambiguous reaction from the Royal College of Nursing. No wonder he went rushing along to a nursing conference last week to make nurse-friendly noises which added up to a total of £500,000-worth of promises for nursing. I read the hon. Gentleman's speeches to ensure that he is not allowed to get away with the speeches he makes in health debates where he simply reads out a series of anecdotes in order to obscure the damage that Labour's health policy would do to the national health service.

Mr. Heppell: It is unfair to make comparisons with Labour's plans. We are proposing an alternative to fundholding. The Secretary of State has probably forgotten the Audit Commission report of 22 May 1996. It said that fundholding costs millions of pounds in extra administrative costs, provides no extra benefit to patients, does not fit in with health authority plans for local people and means that decisions about hospital care are taken without the involvement of hospital doctors. That is what we propose to replace, not what the Secretary of State suggests.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman takes me neatly on to my next point.

The speech by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury in December meant that Labour had at last come off the fence in respect of fundholding. Month after month there were conflicting messages from different parts of the Labour party about fundholding. The Leader of the Opposition briefed *The Sunday Times* in October to the effect that he supported fundholding and that fundholders had nothing to fear from Labour. Then the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury briefed two separate newspapers with completely contradictory messages. On 4 December, *The Independent* reported: "Labour to scrap fundholding". That was based on a briefing offered by the hon. Gentleman. One day later, *Doctor* magazine reported:

"Labour promises to retain fundholding".

The hon. Gentleman was seeking to take a middle way between preserving fundholding and abolishing it, recognising that more than half of Britain's GPs have chosen fundholding because they recognise that it is the way of delivering the best NHS care to their patients.

The hon. Gentleman has now made the position clear, however. He made it crystal clear on the Dimbleby programme yesterday. When asked about Labour's proposed replacement for GP fundholding, he said:

"There will be a requirement within three years for GPs to join a locality group."

When Jonathan Dimbleby said:

"All fundholding GPs in individual practices now will have to join up in their locality into one supergroup",

the hon. Gentleman replied, "Yes, indeed."

The hon. Gentleman has at least made it crystal clear that Labour plans to snuff out fundholding. The hon. Gentleman has bowed to the pressure from old Labour. If he had mentioned that in his speech, he might have got a cheer from his hon. Friends on the Bench below the Gangway. They came in hope and the hon. Gentleman had an opportunity to throw them a bit of red meat, but instead he told a few anecdotes in an irrelevant journey around the national health service.

That commitment leaves the hon. Gentleman with the difficulty of defending a clear commitment which flies in the face of the views of the majority of GPs. Howard Glennerster at the London School of Economics said that fundholding had provided

"a shift in the balance of power back to general practice for the first time this century."

Successive Health Ministers—Labour and Conservative—have sought a shift of power back towards primary care. Fundholding has delivered that, and not just in the opinion of Government supporters and sympathisers. An article in the *New Statesman* by Mr. Stephen Pollard, a former research director of the Fabian Society, puts the case for fundholding. This scheme has improved the quality of primary care in the health service and, indeed, has improved the health service as a whole.

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): I have listened carefully to both sides of the debate, including the proposals by the Opposition spokesman. Until the last few moments of the speech by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), I could discern proposals relating only to an increase in bureaucracy. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I are alarmed to think that reduction or abolition of fundholding practices will decrease the effectiveness of GP care for patients. I should have hoped that a health debate would be about patients and patient care, but instead there has been great discussion about structures in the health service, and the Labour party want to destroy a structure that has really helped patients.

Mr. Dorrell: I could not agree more. My right hon. Friend is making what is the strongest argument in defence of fundholding. That is why barely one in five GPs believe that Labour has produced an adequate answer to the empowerment of GPs that fundholding has provided. A recent survey of fundholding opinion found that 71 per cent. of GPs surveyed rejected Labour's proposals outright, precisely for the reason that my right hon. Friend gives—they undermine the capacity of GPs to deliver high-quality care to their patients.

David Colin-Thomé, a former Labour candidate, said that the proposals of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury amount to

"the standard health authority model with a few GPs thrown in".

That is what the hon. Gentleman is offering, in the opinion of a former Labour candidate.

Mr. Chris Smith: In that case, can the Secretary of State tell us why 56 per cent. of GPs polled by *Doctor* say that they will vote Labour?

Mr. Dorrell: If the hon. Gentleman ever holds my responsibilities, he will have to address how to secure the support of the majority of GPs who have chosen fundholding because they believe that it is in the interests of their patients. Doctors have chosen the option of fundholding because they believe that it allows them to do their jobs better. The hon. Gentleman has tabled a set of proposals that 71 per cent. of those doctors have rejected outright.

[Mr. Dorrell]

As Mr. Pollard concludes in his article:

"That this act of vandalism should be contemplated by Labour is doubly ironic. The NHS is Labour's proudest boast, and it was Bevan who saw the GP as the gatekeeper and patient's best friend. Fundholding is no more than a logical development of Bevan's vision."

That is the argument that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury will have to answer. It is presented not in a Tory newspaper but in the *New Statesman* in the words of a former director of research for the Fabian Society.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Should we not consider another point when looking at fundholding? Does my right hon. Friend recall that, in many health debates and perhaps Question Times too, Labour Members have complained that patients of fundholding doctors get better service than those who do not have fundholding doctors? Are we not back to the old Labour belief that, instead of trying to lift them to the level of those receiving some good, we should get rid of the whole lot?

Mr. Dorrell: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. Such a reaction to a model that has been chosen by the majority of GPs, and, as has been demonstrated, delivers improvements in patient care, is extraordinary. Indeed, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury argues against fundholding precisely on the ground that it has delivered improvements to patient care. To remove the system that has delivered such improvements in order to rely on the one that has not seems to be a contortion of logic which I find impossible to understand.

Mr. Heppell: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dorrell: No, I shall conclude.

The truth is that, when Labour deals with health, it carries absolutely no conviction. It makes silly, superficial points on waiting lists, has nothing whatever to say about the private finance initiative and promises a huge new upheaval on the purchaser side of the health service. Most fundamentally, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury is prevented by the leader of the Labour party and the shadow Chancellor from saying anything at all about resources.

In every year since 1979, the Government have expanded the resources available to the NHS—in sharp distinction to our predecessors. I remind the House that health spending was lower in 1979 than in 1976. We have grown the health service year after year through 18 years in office. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that, during the five years of the next Parliament, the next Conservative Government will deliver growth in real-terms spending on the NHS year on year on year. That is the commitment that the Conservative party gives. As *The Guardian* said clearly, for the Labour party:

"Honouring next year's settlement is meaningless. Labour can hardly take away money already promised. What it must do is match the Tory five-year promise: real increases year on year on year."

That is a commitment that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury simply cannot give. It represents the ultimate choice that the electorate and the people who work in the health service will have to make. Until the hon. Gentleman can pledge a growing NHS under a Labour Government, all his rhetoric is so much spit and wind. He likes to think that he can bask in the glow of the memory of Aneurin Bevan. That may be good in Labour committee rooms, but it will not cut ice on the hustings or in the NHS. The hon. Gentleman holds an important key responsibility; he has not begun to measure up to it. I look forward to more and more opportunities to expose his hollowness to the House and the country.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dorrell: No.

Mr. Clarke *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

Mr. Clarke: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a point of order.

Mr. Clarke: Was it in order for the Secretary of State to make a speech that failed to relate to the motion and not say one word—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Had I thought at any time that the Secretary of State was not relating his speech to the motion, I would have intervened immediately.

5.4 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The Secretary of State's long and, at times, repetitive speech reminded me of a celebrated apology by George Bernard Shaw.

"I'm sorry",

he said,

"for writing at such length. There wasn't time to write more briefly."

The right hon. Gentleman spoke at greater length than my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), but not to more effect. Anyone who believes, as the right hon. Gentleman pretends, that the founding principles of the national health service are in safe keeping with the Conservative party will have no difficulty in believing that pigs, even Lord Emsworth's beloved Empress of Blandings, might fly.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morris: I must proceed.

The Conservatives contested its founding principles when the NHS was created and still seek to undermine them today. As the Prime Minister was beside himself to remind me at an hour-long meeting that I had with him about the Government's obstruction of a private Member's Bill that I was then promoting—my Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill—in the third year of his premiership:

"This is a non-interventionist and deregulating government",

and thus, he said, in fundamental conflict with crucially important provisions of my Bill.

The Government are no less in fundamental conflict with the principles of the national health service when it was founded, and the sooner the NHS is under the direction of people who genuinely believe in them, the more likely it is that their purpose will be fully achieved, not least that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said, of restoring equity to the service and fairness between its patients.

The opening speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury was one of high distinction. It was that of a man both determined and well equipped to tackle existing wrongs and to achieve improving quality of care. I am naturally delighted also that my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) shares the Front Bench with him in this debate. As the House knows, the role of my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West is one of special significance to me. What he has already achieved for long-term sick and disabled people alone entitles him to the highest regard in all parts of this House.

The Secretary of State has important duties for the well-being of Britain's 6.9 million disabled people: for example, that of ensuring full and ready access to the services to which they are entitled under section 2 of my Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. The right hon. Gentleman must be aware how much the organisations of and for disabled people have wanted him—and want him now—to exercise that duty with the same sense of responsibility and commitment as his ministerial predecessor, Sir Hugh Rossi.

Sir Hugh, one of my Conservative successors as Minister for disabled people, made their mandatory duties under section 2 of the Act strikingly clear to all local authorities when he told the city of Liverpool and the London borough of Wandsworth that they were acting unlawfully in keeping disabled people on waiting lists for services for which they had been assessed under the section. He instructed the two local authorities to clear their waiting lists forthwith by providing the many hundreds of disabled people involved with the help to which they were entitled by law. If the Secretary of State is prepared to listen to no one else in this important matter, I hope that he and his ministerial colleagues will at least concede that what their predecessor said and did is worthy not only of careful study but urgent emulation.

I spoke the other day to a severely disabled woman about ministerial attitudes to the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 in anticipation of this debate. She said, "They are dragging their feet." Looking down, she added, "And tell them they're lucky to have feet to drag." She is not alone in her anxiety about the Government's growing failure to give meaningful effect to legislation that is so deeply important to their independence and well-being.

The Secretary of State and his colleagues often get themselves into a muddle in trying to decide whether to say that the last Labour Government did too little or too much for long-term sick and disabled people. They try to square the circle by saying both. For example, while boasting that they have given them more help than we did, they repeal hugely important legislative advances that we made for disabled people. That can be documented at length, but I ask the House to consider just one instance.

During my time as Minister with responsibility for the disabled, in 1975, the Labour Government legislated to link disability benefits with growth in prices or average earnings, whichever was the more beneficial to disabled people. The ending of that link, after the change of Government in 1979, had cost recipients of invalidity or incapacity benefit alone £8.57 billion by the end of the year 1994-95. Given the rate of progression of the Government's savings in the final three years for which figures are available, that figure must now be in excess of £12 billion.

Recipients of the attendance allowance had been denied £5.85 billion by the end of 1994-95, which must now have risen to more than £8 billion. Other cash benefits for disabled people have been cut just as drastically below the levels for which I legislated under the last Labour Government. There was even a saving to the Exchequer, by the end of 1994-95, of £420 million on our pioneering invalid care allowance, which today must have increased to more than £600 million.

Ministers would need more polished oratorical powers than Demosthenes to argue away factual information of that eloquence. The figures that I have given are not mine: they are quoted from parliamentary replies that I had from the present Minister for Social Security and Disabled People as recently as 10 February. I am grateful to him for correcting his earlier replies. I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to read the figures he gave me.

The central truth about our achievements and those of our successors is that, by common consent, Britain led the world in the 1970s in legislating to make life better for disabled people and their carers. That is why I was asked by the United Nations in February 1979 to open the discussion in New York that paved the way for the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981 and why I was invited by Rehabilitation International to chair the world planning group that drafted the "Charter for the 1980s" for disabled people worldwide. Britain was then unquestionably a world leader in this policy area. As everyone knows, we are anything but a world leader today. In the north, south, east and west of the world, there are today countries that used to follow our example but that we now lag woefully behind.

I must make one more point about disability legislation in this debate. In government, we, for our part, went far beyond our manifesto commitments of 1974. There was no commitment then to legislate for the mobility allowance, for the non-contributory invalidity pension, for the invalid care allowance or for the disabled housewife's allowance. Those were advances made over and above our manifesto commitments, and I am totally sanguine that my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West will again make action speak louder than words as the Minister.

Far too few resources are spent today on research into tackling even the major scourges that still destroy the health and wreck the lives of their victims. Consider the reply that I had on 18 February to my parliamentary question on the progress of research funded by the Government into Alzheimer's disease. Anyone who reads the reply will be left wondering why voluntary organisations should have to spend so much of their time and meagre resources in funding research, the benefits of which are manifestly important to us all.

Again, why cannot the Government find even a moment of parliamentary time to enact the Disabled Persons and Carers (Short-Term Breaks) Bill, so ably piloted through the House of Lords by Lord Rix? Not to

[Mr. Morris]

allow it to achieve its admirable purpose of strengthening the ability of carers to cope with their problems will inevitably lead to further dependence and higher spending by the national health service; so it is self-defeating as well as inhumane. Ministers will know that there is another opportunity this Friday for them to stop obstructing the Bill, and I implore them to let this much-needed measure go forward then without further delay.

I turn now to the Secretary of State's responsibility in relation to the compellingly urgent claims of people with haemophilia who were infected by contaminated blood products in the course of NHS treatment. There is a deep sense of injustice among them. The tragic fate of three brothers explains why.

Two of the brothers were infected with HIV by NHS treatment and died of Aids-related illnesses. The third was infected with hepatitis C and died of liver failure. The two who died of HIV infection had financial help from the Government and were able to make provision for their families. The third brother went to his grave having been refused any help at all. He could make no provision for the future well-being of his family.

All three brothers died from the same cause: contaminated NHS blood products; but the third brother was deprived of the help given to the other two by a Government who provided £70 million for people infected with HIV and set up the Macfarlane trust to give them continuing support. The Government accepted their moral responsibility in the case of HIV infection. They have the same responsibility now in hepatitis C cases.

The Government argue that compensating those infected with hepatitis C would take money away from patient care in the NHS. To say that is to bark not just up the wrong tree but in the wrong forest. The payments made in the HIV cases came from contingency moneys, which is what the Haemophilia Society is asking for now for the hepatitis C victims. The society simply wants the terms of reference of the Macfarlane trust to be extended to include them.

Measured against the pain and suffering endured, the claim is extremely modest. Hepatitis C attacks the liver and is life threatening. Current medical opinion is that up to 80 per cent. of those infected will develop chronic liver disease, of whom about 20 per cent. will develop severe liver problems, such as cirrhosis or liver cancer. Scores of those infected have already died, and the death rate is accelerating.

In recognition of the scale of the problems, an all-party early-day motion was tabled in my name and now has 273 signatories: a majority of all Members of Parliament who are free to sign such motions. As the list of hon. Members shows, the issue is treated in the motion not as one of right and left, but of right and wrong.

The Haemophilia Society, with strong support from both sides of the House, is simply calling for parity and has documented in an impressive recent report the appalling effects on families of failure to concede their claim. In none of the campaigns I have been closely involved in here over the years—among them those for the thalidomide victims, for children with dyslexia and autism, for war widows and for haemophiliacs infected with HIV—have I had so strong a sense that no campaigning should be necessary to right such an obvious wrong.

The Government know we are right and that our campaign is completely free from party animus. They know too that, given the nod by Ministers, the Commons would settle the issue within an hour. The Government's legislative programme is gossamer thin. Parliamentary time could unquestionably be found. If Ministers fail to act, and the campaign has to go on, then go on it will, but I most strongly urge the Secretary of State to act now and to make it clear that he is doing so before the debate concludes.

5.20 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), especially as I have also been involved in the past few years in both the campaigns that he mentioned for haemophiliacs. I agree that disastrous, unwanted and unlooked-for damage was done to their health, which none of us could have foreseen. I hope that eventually the case will be accepted, but there are financial implications and the question of apportioning blame. Those are difficult legal matters that have yet to be settled. The issue is approached in a non-partisan way, which shows that on health matters it is possible for both sides of the House to work together.

It is therefore all the more regrettable that today the speech by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) was nothing but a brawl. Time and again he initiates these debates, motivated by the approaching general election, but he has little regard for the facts of the case in terms of the development of the health service and the difficulties that it faces: he merely tries to rubbish all that goes on in the health service. That just will not do. If the Labour party were elected, it has already pledged not to increase public expenditure. When the hon. Gentleman was challenged by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, he could not give a single example of how he would heal what he calls the wounds of the health service.

We had a simple, stupid brawl from the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. No one would imagine, from what he said, that people in the health service are working to the highest standard of excellence that can be found anywhere in the world. No one would imagine that the Government had funded such a huge increase in expenditure over many years. In real terms, we have seen an increase in funding from £7 billion in 1979 to more than £43 billion for next year. How dare the hon. Gentleman, aided and abetted by his hon. Friends who know that the election is coming, denigrate a Government who have funded that increase in expenditure? The increase has been nearly 70 per cent., allowing for inflation. I doubt whether any Labour Member would have the guts to make such attacks, were it not for the general election and their wish to make party political capital.

The damage done to people who work in the health service is appalling. Morale can be seriously affected, and the trust of the wider public in the health service is also damaged. Overwhelmingly, people receive magnificent treatment from the NHS which is unrivalled anywhere else in the world. We stand high in the estimation of

people who observe our health service. I know people from the United States who have come to study our methods. They do not go home and rubbish the health service: they recognise its positive and solid values.

I do not claim that all is well, and I will come to the problems in a moment, but I ask why the doctors, the nurses, the specialists and the people who clean the wards cannot be taken out of the horrible cockpit of politics. It is not necessary to drag them into it, and it demeans Parliament to do so. I am fed up to the back teeth with that tactic, and I dare say the health workers are too.

In my constituency, the local hospital has developed its services over the years. When I was first elected, it was unusual to speak to a constituent who had had a hip operation. Now when I go canvassing, I meet people who have had operations on both hips. Life expectancy has been prolonged and many services have been improved while I have been in Parliament. We do not hear about that from the Opposition: instead, we get constant bitching as they continually demean the high quality service that we get from the NHS.

We know that there are difficulties, including an aging population, rising expectations, and improvements in technology. All those factors add millions of pounds to the NHS budget. I remember a time, shortly before I entered the House, when we thought that all was well with the health service. It was cheap to run and none of the life-prolonging technologies were in use. We were living in the post-war illusion that the country's health would be improved as time went by and that costs would therefore go down.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: I resent the suggestion that complaints about the current state of the health service are, in the hon. Gentleman's words, bitching. Does the hon. Gentleman accept the words of Robert Tinston, who works for the North-West Regional Executive, in the introduction to his report to Alan Langlands:

"Over recent years there has been a steady increasing pressure placed on secondary care"—

in other words, hospital services—

"to handle emergency admissions over the winter period. The pressure became so intense at times, during 1995-96"—

when the report was written—

"that the system was in danger of collapsing."

Is that bitching?

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: It has not collapsed. I am not talking about people in the health service, who are bound to know what the pressures are. I do not deny that there are pressures and I have already given three reasons for them. We have had a winter surge in elderly people seeking hospital beds, because there are more elderly people around than when we started the health service.

It was thought when the health service was introduced that costs would steadily go down, but it was not many years before people started complaining about the cascade of medicine that was poured down patients' throats. That led to the introduction of prescription charges. Who introduced them? The Labour Government of the time introduced them, and one of their Ministers resigned over it. For years, Labour Members have complained about prescription charges, although there is plenty of protection for the chronically sick and those in vulnerable age groups.

The key issue is the efficient use of resources. The Labour party's policy does not promise extra resources for the NHS. Why cannot the Labour party spokesmen be constructive? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a most able speech and he confronted and challenged the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, who had no answers. In the Secretary of State, we have a man who fully understands the complexity of the health service, the pressures on it and, more importantly, the ways in which we can surmount the difficulties and gradually eliminate them. That is the constructive way to look at the problem.

An article by Kathy Jones in the *Fabian Review* suggested that the Labour party has taken a paternal interest in the health service. The article continued:

"But the fact that the NHS is Labour's issue has frequently led to laziness, both in developing policy and in presenting it. 'Jennifer's Ear' is perhaps the best known example."

The article went on to say that the

"soundbite approach to NHS policy may help Labour to win the election but it will not help the party run the NHS when in power."

Instead of concentrating on tackling the problems in the NHS, the Labour party concentrates on ownership. The article continued:

"Most Labour front bench speeches refer to creeping privatisation. They argue that the introduction of market mechanisms in the NHS is the forerunner of privatisation of NHS providers. They regard Trust status for NHS providers with the same suspicion. I would argue that, first, this is not true and second, it is not important."

She is absolutely right, and that is one reason why the negative carping approach of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and others is thoroughly wrong.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): The hon. Gentleman started by saying that we should keep party politics out of health, but he has gone into that subject. Is there not a contradiction in that?

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: The Opposition have been rumbled. I wanted to establish that the approach of Opposition Members is wrong and that people in the NHS resent it enormously. It is about time that Opposition Members realised that we know what they are doing and that their reasons for doing so do not stand up. I am making a point that I am entitled to make.

Other countries spend no more money on health than the UK—despite what Opposition Members think—and extra funding comes not from the state, but through private provision. Before any Opposition Member comments on the need for increased private provision as a crucial supplement to Government funding, I stress that independent health care is particularly encouraged by socialist countries in the European Union.

In Spain, the socialist Government have a public-private mix in which 31 per cent. of hospital beds are privately owned. In Belgium, there are 48,000 private beds out of a total of 77,000. In France, 33 per cent. of hospital care comes from the private sector. I could go on, as this is the story across the continent. Co-operation between the state and the private sector is now normal, and I am not alone in believing that there is a need in the UK for private provision to be developed.

[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith]

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State quoted Stephen Pollard, a former research director of the Fabian Society, who has written about this matter. He said:

"With the electorate unwilling to support a return to the old 'top-down' approach to welfare provision, it is now time to examine how the independent sector can . . . augment the state system".

Let us look at other countries. In Sweden, the health care system is going through a rapid transitional phase, and is moving from a traditional budget-based and steered scheme to an internal market model with a separation of purchasers and providers. The changes are running in parallel with developments in Britain, although the Swedish system is more decentralised. Doctors in Sweden have been asked whether the new system is motivating them to become less concerned about their patients, but it is recognised that they have acquired a new attitude and an awareness of the resource aspects of health care. A report on the matter states:

"So far there are no indications that these changes of behaviour have led to a decreased quality of medical care (that is withdrawal of necessary and meaningful treatments). There are some indications of an increased quality in the service component of the care."

How many times have I heard Labour spokesmen state that "creeping privatisation" would lead to doctors being interested only in money and not in the care of their patients?

The Netherlands has also had problems with increases in expenditure and demand, and reforms have had to be made. At the moment, GP services are mostly private, but the system of health care provided by hospitals is mostly public. That is a problem that they must address, and it has caused political divisions in the Netherlands, where there is a larger number of parties than in this country. As a consequence, no decision has yet been made on how far they can improve the use of the private sector.

In France, the characteristic of the system is free choice for the patient with no restriction of access to a general practitioner or specialist. A report from the French embassy on health care states:

"It might seem strange to someone used to the NHS that a person can go to one specialist in the morning and if not satisfied see another in the afternoon . . . In France most people expect to go out from the doctor's with a prescription. It is difficult for a doctor to refuse when a patient asks for a particular treatment, since the doctor might lose that client who could go to other doctors to find one who does not refuse."

France faces the problems of rising expenditure and an increasing debt that the Government cannot fund, and these are not unique to France. For years, some were convinced that the French system was the best in the world, but they ignored the fact that it had become too expensive and not as efficient as it should be. The report continues:

"However, despite all this, it will still be possible to survive under the present system, even if one is not rich!"

Mr. Heppell: The quotations are very interesting, but the Secretary of State might find it difficult to go to his Cabinet colleagues and say that he thinks that we ought to adopt the better European standards of health care. The climate in the Conservative party might not be right for him to say that.

The examples given by the right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) are interesting, as were the Secretary of State's statistics, but many Opposition Members see the reality. Tory Members are telling me that things are getting better and better, and that I am either bitching or raising a political point. But in my constituency, no elective surgery will be carried out at all on the patients of non-fundholding general practitioners—including at the Nottingham City hospital and the Queen's Medical Centre—until April. That will be a total of seven months with no operations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should have raised that point earlier in his intervention.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: The hon. Gentleman was obviously too busy talking to his hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) to fully understand what I said. I should make it clear that all those countries are facing rising costs and, without exception, are looking at how they can make more efficient use of resources. As part of that philosophy, they are using the private sector to help them on their way. That is important, and it is happening in socialist countries as well. But Opposition Members will not look at the matter in that way.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that every country that he has mentioned with a private-public mix spends a far higher proportion of gross domestic product on health than this country does? Our system—which is basically public with a fringe element of private provision—is the most cost-effective health service in the world. To start moving down the road of greater private sector involvement will only increase costs without benefiting patients.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: If they thought that, why are those countries which have to some extent depended on the private sector moving down that road? They are not so daft that they will move to a situation that would lead to the conclusion that the hon. Gentleman advocates. *[Interruption.]* I have the reports here. Those countries are not moving down the road to more expensive health provision. They believe that by reforms which parallel our own—the purchaser-provider split and things of that order—they are more likely to gain the efficiency and the additional resources that are necessary if they are to fund the higher cost. That was the purpose of the article written in *Fabian Review*—making better use. That is what we are doing.

Had the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) been listening, he would have heard me say that much of the increase in the percentage of gross domestic product that other countries can boast for their health services is due to the use made of the private sector and I quoted some figures. That is what brings the percentage in, and it is important.

Mr. Ainger *indicated dissent.*

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: The figures are there. If the hon. Gentleman reads my speech, he will realise that those figures support my argument. Those countries are going further down that road. Unless they were blind, daft or batty, they would be unlikely to go down that road if they did not feel that better use of private resources and better management would lead to better delivery of the services, which they all find are under strain. There is

nothing about us that is unique or different or that is made more difficult by Government policy. On the contrary, the reforms—trusts and funds, and primary care which we debated the other day—are all constructive measures designed to meet the problems of a service that is expanding because of the extra costs imposed by an elderly population and modern technology. That is why I believe that it is bad for us to continue this debate without tackling those problems.

We need a united view. If we cannot agree on individual points that can improve the health service, I should have thought that we could at least agree on the need and the methodology in general terms and let Ministers and those running the health service get on with the job.

5.41 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I have great sympathy with the general proposition put forward by the right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith). I have argued from this Bench before that much of our debates on the health service is pointless. It is simply an exchange of statistics and arguing about matters that could be objectively verified, which leaves people out there thinking that they should not trust any politician because they are not tackling the main issues.

I looked up the right hon. Member for Wealden in "Dod's Parliamentary Companion". He was married in the year that I was born, so he has been around a little longer than I and perhaps remembers the pre-NHS health service a little. But we share a commitment to the NHS, which has been a great success. He is right in his analysis that there is a similar challenge in health care the world over. In advanced democracies such as ours, the issues are the same—people are living longer, demanding more, putting on more pressure and costing more.

There is a longer-term debate to be had and I regret that we spend far too much time on these short-term debates. When the election is out of the way, I hope that more politicians will be honest enough to own up to the fact that unless we tackle those issues, we will be serving the people of this country badly. The way we are going on, there will need to be some radical rethinking of how we fund the health service. The right hon. Member for Wealden may have a view about the private sector and more private money coming in. I probably have a different view, as I think that the NHS should remain substantially funded by the taxpayer, but as the NHS is a key part of the welfare state, this issue ought to be addressed and the sooner we get away from short-term exchanges of contradictory information that illuminate nothing the better.

None the less, this is an extraordinary debate. The Labour party has chosen the subject for its sixth Supply day and has entitled the debate "National Health Service"—nothing more specific than that. It is as if the Opposition then suddenly thought that they had better include some other things, so they mixed into the debate about the health service, debates about disability and community care.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Yes.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman says yes, but disabled people do not like the idea that health and community care issues are the only things that matter to them. The Labour party has done disabled people a disservice by lumping disabled people's issues together as a subset in a debate on health—they are not even mentioned in the title and the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) did not mention them in his opening speech.

Mr. Clarke: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: Not for a second. Unlike the Labour health spokesman, who would not give way because he knew that I would ask him a question that he could not answer adequately, I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, whom I respect, but first I must quote something written by some of my party's advisers on disability in 1993. They said:

> "It is a sad fact that debate on disability issues is often assumed to be simply about health, social security or community care. It is also very surprising that this should be so because the disability debate is fundamentally about human rights".

It is about equal treatment, equal citizenship and access. Although there is a movement in the right direction in Labour policy, it falls short of what disabled people want because it does not commit the Labour party to the introduction of a Bill of Rights that would automatically give people equality of treatment. Until the Labour party goes that far—I stand to be corrected—it will not serve the interests of disabled people adequately.

Mr. Clarke: I reciprocate the respect that the hon. Gentleman says that he has for me. Disabled people expect a debate on the health service to be relevant to them and I have had several letters and telephone calls since the Labour party announced that it would use the time to have this extremely important debate. I shall clarify some of the hon. Gentleman's points in my reply, if he is able to stay for the end of the debate.

Mr. Hughes: I do not want to be distracted by this dispute, but the Labour party had an Opposition day on health recently and it could have had a full day's debate today on disabled people's issues, but it chose not to do so. The Labour Opposition have added this issue into a debate on the national health service and disability is not even mentioned in the title.

Mr. Barron: Why does the hon. Gentleman's party not have one?

Mr. Hughes: We get two days a year and the Labour party gets 17—that is one of the reasons. We have had such debates in the past. We, too, receive representations. There is a range of disability issues that we could raise, but they should not be put into a debate on the national health service. If we are to debate them, I hope that before the election the Labour party will go further than its present commitment, as it is not yet sufficiently committed to the equality of treatment for disabled people that they and their representatives want.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Nonsense.

Mr. Hughes: It is not nonsense and it is where the Labour party falls profoundly short.

Mr. Gunnell: I must take issue with the hon. Gentleman, who should think about what he has said. First, he criticised

[Mr. Gunnell]

the motion for being too broad in its scope. Then he suggested that it does not refer to a Bill of Rights, but it refers to

"civil rights for disabled people"

which seems to press the point as far as it should in a motion. I understand his point that the needs of disabled people go beyond health, but I do not understand his objection to the wording of the motion.

Mr. Hughes: I do not want to be overly distracted, but I must repeat Labour policy. The hon. Gentleman can disown it later if he likes. When asked by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People:

"How do you plan to monitor the effectiveness of the Disability Discrimination Act? Will you appoint a disabilities commission to cover all parts of the Act?",

Labour answered:

"We plan to set up a Disability Rights Commission which would take over the duties of the National Disability Council and represent the interests of disabled people and other interested parties. We expect it to come forward with recommendations on how to achieve comprehensive and enforceable civil rights."

A commission will be given the job. As yet—

Mr. Tom Clarke: That is important.

Mr. Hughes: Of course, it is. But the commitment to the legislation should be there now.

Mr. Clarke: It is.

Mr. Hughes: It is not. If we get an advance on Labour policy later, I will welcome it. We look forward to the speech of the hon. Member for Monklands, West.

Mr. Ainger *rose—*

Mr. Hughes: I will not give way again at the moment. We are clear about the need for a Bill of Rights, which needs to come first. With such a Bill, people with disabilities would have, for example, the sort of access to buildings that they have in the United States. It would also give the same access to television by means of signing services. The matter goes well beyond issues of health, social security and community care.

Mr. Ainger: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: I will not for the moment.

A small section of the motion deals with community care. I agree with it but it is a statement of the obvious:

"under this Government community care has become a discredited term associated with inadequate care for those in need and inadequate protection for the general public".

However, not a word follows about what Labour would do about community care.

An article in *Community Care* magazine on 20 February stated:

"National standards and a national inspectorate to safeguard the equity of services for elderly people evidently command even less support in political circles than they do among those working in community care. Of the three main parties, only the Liberal Democrats have come close to taking these ideas on board."

The article sets out criteria for inspection and monitoring.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: In a second.

The article concludes:

"So far, only the Liberal Democrats have made a serious attempt to address this agenda."

I regret that in a cobble-all-together motion that covers three subjects rather than one, there is not one policy commitment from the Labour party, either on health or community care.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I fear that he is still upset because my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) did not give way. The hon. Gentleman says that the motion makes no suggestions about community care, but is not our call for the appointment of a royal commission very important?

Mr. Hughes: A disability rights commission would certainly be better than nothing. We believe strongly that we need one human rights commission to look after everyone's civil rights. We should not segregate racial, gender and disability equality into separate commissions. The Labour party would be better advised to have one general commission. It would be a mistake to have segregated groups of rights upheld by different institutions.

The larger part of the motion deals with the national health service. I welcome this debate, but I share the Secretary of State's surprise that the Labour party still goes on tabling motions on the national health service because, yet again, its motion makes no commitments. That is because, I am sad to say, when it comes to the crucial question of how much more it would put into the NHS, the Labour party is desperately, pathetically wanting. It is committing no new money. It pledges to find £100 million out of existing money for one year only. As the Labour shadow Secretary of State for Health confirmed yesterday on television, he will fight his corner in the second year to see if he can get a bigger share but only of the same cake. Let us not be under any illusions.

Today's *Evening Standard* puts the picture clearly and I commend the editorial, headed "Debating the NHS", which states:

"A month before the 1992 election, the campaign was already in full swing: and it concerned the NHS, the NHS and the NHS. Today, at a similar stage in the electoral cycle, there is a strange absence of debate. If the election were decided on health policy alone,"—

I do not concede this—

"labour would be a racing certainty. For Labour is trusted on health, the Tories not. And it barely matters what either party says or does . . . By committing a future Conservative government to a funding increase in real terms, he"—

the Secretary of State—

"has embarrassed his opposite number Chris Smith, who has been unable make so detailed a pledge."

The editorial poses a set of questions to Labour and concludes:

"And since the public is always bound to be dissatisfied with a service where demand is greater than supply, Labour believes that the political benefits of simply attacking the Government are too

great to give up. But today the issue revolves not around the Conservatives' plans for the NHS but Labour's—and that is a marked change."

That is where we are. It is extraordinary that in today's politics, John Maples's memorandum has proved to be wrong and that it is Labour, of all the parties, which is on the back foot on health service policy.

Mr. Tom Clarke: That is a contradiction.

Mr. Hughes: It is not a contradiction at all. The party that legislated to create the NHS now has the least to say about funding it and is therefore least likely to change it. That is why we tabled an amendment. Sadly, Madam Speaker did not select it, as is the convention in such debates. I tabled it before the Tory amendment but it was not selected because of some Standing Order. Our amendment set out policy commitments. Whatever criticisms people make, I hope that they will notice that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman said that there was a Standing Order that prevented a Liberal amendment from being selected. The Chair is not aware of such a Standing Order.

Mr. Hughes: I checked with the Table Office and there is a Standing Order that says that a Government amendment takes precedence over other amendments. I beg to contradict the Chair on that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is not contradicting the Chair. He is getting himself out of a difficult situation.

Mr. Hughes: I had better not dare to continue this debate. Our amendment is on the Order Paper. It is a wonderful amendment and it has policy in it, unlike Labour's motion.

We believe that the NHS should be secure, strong, efficient and there when people need it. I share the view of the right hon. Member for Wealden on that. There are several immediate issues. First, there should be a commitment to honour pay increases in full, as recommended by the public sector pay review bodies. We suggested that and have budgeted for them to be paid. Labour and the Tories refused to agree to that. They have the same policy and think that the increases should be phased in.

Secondly, we have set out our stall clearly that we want a halt to finance-driven closures and reductions of service as of the beginning of the year. Labour is committed to some halt in London but not anywhere else and the Tories, by definition, are not committed to halting anything and think it should steam ahead because it is all wonderful.

Thirdly, we are committed to £200 million extra a year for staff recruitment, to be funded through taxation. Labour is not committed to that, nor are the Tories. It is evident to everyone that the NHS will need more staff.

Fourthly, we are committed to putting significant money into the reduction of waiting lists. To use a phrase of the Prime Minister's that has been repeated so often that Ministers probably parrot it in their sleep, we are committed to putting £150 million a year, year on year on year on year on year, for five years specifically into the reduction of waiting lists. With such additional money from taxes, we could reduce waiting lists to six months maximum across the board in one Parliament.

We have other important health policy proposals such as the abolition of eye and dental charges. I know that some Conservative Members are sympathetic to that. We believe that there should be a freeze on, and then a review of, prescription charges. We want a ban on all tobacco advertising, save at the point of sale, and on the promotion of sports events by tobacco companies. Those three policies would help our good health promotion policies, as would an independent and effective health education authority.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will the hon. Gentleman take sides on rural dispensing from surgeries and the provision of such services by prescription? Would the Liberals abolish the monopoly in a one-mile radius around existing provision of prescriptions in rural areas? What is the Liberal position on cloning and genetic engineering?

Mr. Hughes: I shall not deal with the second, complicated issue that the hon. Gentleman raises; I could not in a sentence do justice to it. On the first issue, the presumption should be that the present dispensing system should continue. However, it must be patient-determined. Where there is not local access to a service provided by an existing practitioner, there needs to be some liberalisation of the service. I am willing to give the hon. Gentleman a copy of the considered, lengthier statement of our position. It is on record and is not a secret, but it is obviously controversial. I have heard the hon. Gentleman speak about the matter in the House before and I am aware of his regular interest.

There are clearly things wrong with the system that the Government have introduced. First, all general practitioners should be treated equally and funded in the same way. There should be no differential according to whether or not they are in a fundholding practice. They should be funded according to their number of patients and the make-up of their practice in terms of local statistical factors such as morbidity, ethnicity and mortality.

Secondly, we should not have a system whereby a patient who goes through the door of one GP receives speedier treatment from the local trust than the patient of another doctor by virtue of the former GP's status as a fundholder. That is evidence of a two-tier health service—it is not worth arguing about that—which is not a national health service available to all.

Other inequalities must also be dealt with. Depending on where one lives, one may not be able to get a dentist on the NHS. Again, there is no longer an equal health service. Depending on where one lives, the chances of being operated on speedily vary hugely because waiting lists are different. Depending on where one lives, one may have a much higher chance of having one's operation cancelled.

As I said in the context of community care, we believe that it is important to establish a national inspectorate of health and social care. Its work would be complementary to that of the Audit Commission and it could check independently to ensure that good practice exists whether in the surgery, clinic, hospital or wherever. The education service benefits from the existence of Ofsted. We need a similar body in the health service which can say, "That is not good enough; you must improve."

[Mr. Hughes]

The last and most crucial issue is funding, which the right hon. Member for Wealden has already discussed. We must address fundamentally where we will get the money for the NHS. We have a cheap health service, which costs us 7p in the pound—we pay less than nearly every other comparable country. The Americans pay the equivalent of 14p in the pound for a far less good health service. We must debate whether more public sector money and more taxes should be devoted to our health service. My party has debated that for the past two years and we have come to the conclusion that, certainly in the short and medium term, the NHS should be funded more from taxation and from public funds. That is why we have made various commitments. I know that that promise may prove unpopular at the general election, but that is the risk we take. In fact, I do not think that that commitment will be unpopular, because I believe that the public want more public money spent on their public health service.

We have made five commitments. First, NHS funding should be guaranteed year on year on year on year on year, but our policy is different from that of the Tories, because we believe that funding should keep pace with NHS inflation not national inflation, which is running at a lower rate. It is no good giving a year on year increase if, in real terms, it does not keep pace with the cost of running the service.

Secondly, we must remove the most bureaucratic elements from the system. I am not slating managers. We need good health service managers, but we do not need people to manage a system when one does not need that part of the system. Money can be saved from bureaucracy. We are not, however, at the beginning of a five-year programme, committed to spending money to be derived from that saving. Unlike the Labour party, I do not believe that one can obtain £100 million overnight from a pot marked "bureaucracy savings". *[Interruption.]* It is completely impossible to save £100 million overnight after the general election from bureaucracy savings. It is a figment of imagination, and that money will not immediately exist.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: As the hon. Gentleman has rightly pointed out, we are in agreement on certain facts. I should like to question his desire that we should look to the taxpayer to fund the ever-growing gap between resources and people's needs. That gap is apparent in this country and others and nearly all countries are considering how far private provision can play a role even though the main bulk of the expenditure provided will come from public funds. That possibility must be addressed, otherwise expenditure of £150 million year on year on year will be just peanuts.

Mr. Hughes: I understand that. Let me clarify that our £150 million yearly commitment is just to reduce the waiting lists. We have committed in total £550 million each year for five years above the inflation-linked amount. I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman that we need to change fundamentally the funding of the health service and opt for an increasingly privately funded one. I am happy to be honest with the right hon. Gentleman because we need to look beyond our manifestos and the general election. The health service in Britain provides a huge amount of fee-paying treatment for people from abroad. We are very successful and offer some of the best health services in the world. People who come from abroad, and who are not citizens paying into the NHS, should pay for the treatment that they receive. There is a market for us to expand that area of health care.

I believe that in the next Parliament we will also have a debate about whether we should abolish national insurance in favour of a separate health and social care tax. The right hon. Gentleman is aware that national insurance contributions no longer fund pensions. They are not directly related to pensions; instead they go into the great Government kitty over the road at the Treasury. I understand that the right hon. Gentleman hopes to be a Member of the next Parliament—with a majority of 20,000 he should be, otherwise the Tories will be in trouble—and on that assumption I look forward to debating that issue with him. We need an urgent debate on the longer-term issues.

Returning to the present funding commitments, the specific list of changes from which the health service would benefit desperately also includes the provision of its funds three years at a time and a move to a minimum of three-year contracts between health authorities and trusts. As the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) has already said, it should also benefit from a fair allocation policy, according to which the capitation formula should apply fully across the country. That would mean that that formula is not applied partially, according to local criteria. We must correct the current inequity governing the application of the funding formula throughout the country.

Today's great debate has been about waiting lists. The Secretary of State admitted to me that it is unarguable that waiting lists are at their highest level. That is not the end of the story. It matters to the individual more how long he or she waits than how many people have to wait. A study of the relevant table of figures since 1974 reveals two things which are pertinent and interesting. First, according to the figures as they were compiled then, I am afraid to say that from 1974 to 1979, when the Labour party was last in Government, waiting lists consistently went up. That is according to figures provided by the Library, which record that in every quarter of every year the number of patients waiting increased. Secondly, the figures started to come down only in September 1979. They then bounced around and went up and down, but in recent years the number of patients waiting for treatment went down. Those figures have however, started to increase in the past year.

I have tried to persuade the Secretary of State and the Labour spokesman that we must collect independently the relevant statistics. I am not impugning the integrity of the statisticians, but these sorts of figures should be produced independently so that the relevant factual information is taken out of the political debate. Statistics change, as does the assessment of them. We now include the number of day cases treated, as well as all sorts of other information. The key thing that people outside are aware of, however, is that in recent times waiting lists have started to go up. Now, people are not even being treated within 18 months, as stipulated in the patients charter.

The figures relating to the time between one's first consultation and treatment also provide just half the story, because one must often wait a hell of a long time between the first appointment and the consultation. We therefore need to study two sets of figures.

We have all studied the current figures. I did the same thing when I did my duty in the Wirral last week—incidentally, I was born in Cheshire and have family in that part of the world. I visited Clatterbridge hospital; it is brilliant and offers an extremely good service. That hospital has done well although there remains a debate about whether it should provide accident and emergency facilities. According to Government figures, however, in the past year, more than 200 operations were cancelled at the last minute in the Wirral. Figures are set out for every quarter. Some patients are not being readmitted to hospital for operations within the one month waiting time stipulated by the patients charter.

We must establish standards that are met. If we have a patients charter that says that if one's operation is cancelled, one will be admitted within a month of that cancellation, that must happen. If not, the charter is a paper tiger and there is no use having it. If the patients charter states that a patient should be seen and admitted within a maximum of 18 months, we must honour that commitment. People must have a right to enforce it—their inability to do so is one of the weaknesses of the current system.

Today's debate was called by the Labour party. The Labour Opposition motion is critical of the Government in certain respects and we can agree with those sentiments. We will vote for it. The first part of the Government's amendment is unexceptional. The second part suggests that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 offered everything that was needed. We disagree, and we will vote against the Government on that.

I shall, however, end with a warning: it is becoming increasingly clear to us and, I think, to the public in Britain that, on health policy, there is less and less fundamental difference between the Labour party and the Tories. Fundamentally, they are both going to commit the same amount of money; if there were to be a Labour Government health service resources would not be increased. If the Labour party thinks that it can get away with trying to pretend to the country that, under a Labour Government, there would be a great, new, advanced development of funds and support for the health service, it is misleading itself. I hope that it will not be able to get away with that between now and the election. My hon. Friends and I will commit as much of our effort to exposing the hollowness of the Labour party's health policy as we have committed, and continue to commit, to exposing the hollowness of the Government's.

6.10 pm

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I am grateful to be called to contribute to the debate and it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). I agree with some of his points and disagree with others, but at least he always makes a thoughtful contribution. Sadly, the same cannot be said of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who led for the Opposition.

Millions of people are treated by our NHS every year and there are bound to be failures and justifiable complaints; however, I fear that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury was selective in his use of complaints and figures. I shall be selective in my use of NHS statistics so that I can at least give people the other side of the story, which is that, by and large, our national health service is an outstanding success. It treats more and more people every day; more and more funds are committed to it; and there are more nurses, midwives, doctors and dentists serving it than there were when the Labour party was last in power.

I do not know whether we spend a smaller percentage of our gross domestic product on the NHS than other countries. If so, I suspect that it has something to do with the fact that most of those other countries have a greater proportion of private, as opposed to public, health care schemes. In the last five years of the last Labour Government, the percentage of GDP spent on our NHS went down from 4.8 per cent. to 4.7 per cent. Since the Conservatives were returned in 1979 the amount spent has increased from 4.7 per cent. of GDP to 5.8 per cent.—a commendable trend.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I can confirm that we spend less of our GDP than other countries, but two aspects must be borne in mind: first, that other countries, including the United States and France, spend more on insurance and bureaucracy; and, secondly, that overall we receive a better return on the money that we spend.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is correct.

If we take inflation into consideration—I concede that it is inflation measured by the retail prices index—when considering the funding of the NHS in the last five years of the last Labour Government, we find that it was cut by 2.7 per cent. We can contrast that with the increase under the Conservative Government—albeit over the longer period of almost 18 years—of 74 per cent.

The number of in-patient treatments has risen dramatically. We should call such treatments episodes, because they do not necessarily relate to different patients and we would be in trouble if more than 10 million people—almost one fifth of the total United Kingdom population—had had to have NHS in-patient treatment. The number of NHS case episodes has risen from about 6 million a year when the Labour party was last in government to well over 10 million a year now.

Waiting times fluctuate. There is always greatest pressure on the NHS at this time of the year and I do not doubt that waiting times have gone up, which should concern to us all. However, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey was correct to say that waiting times went up during the stewardship of the last Labour Government. They started to go down under this Government and generally go up and down. I join my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in saying that what really matters is not the numbers on the waiting lists, but the length of time before patients receive their treatment. Those times have risen recently, which gives cause for concern—but they have sometimes gone down.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey is committing his party to more expenditure on the NHS, as we are, but he is committing a specific amount for specific projects. In the mid-1980s, the then Prime Minister decided to commit a huge sum to deal with patient waiting lists—at the back of my mind I have a figure of more than £1,000 million. She committed that money mid-year to the whole of the service, including efforts to tackle the problem of waiting numbers and lists. For a few months,

[Sir Sydney Chapman]

the policy succeeded and the numbers decreased, but it was not many months before the numbers started to rise again.

Pay is better for those who work in the NHS. It may not be sufficient, particularly for nurses, but let us remember that nurses' pay has risen 70 per cent. in the past 18 years. If their pay is insufficient now, it must have been even worse in the dark distant days of the last Labour Government.

The elderly are better cared for. I do not say that with complacency; the elderly need even more care, as do the mentally ill, but there are better provisions for them. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) has contributed to the debate: I pay tribute to him for the work that he has done for the disabled and I appreciate the tribute that he paid to my former colleague, Sir Hugh Rossi. The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) and my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People deserve credit for what they have done for the disabled. If we take into account inflation as measured by the RPI, funding for the disabled—by that I mean not only disabled people, but the long-term sick—has quadrupled. More needs to be done, but much has been done by the Government and I give them credit for that.

There has also been a massive building programme. At my latest count, the Government have been responsible for completing about 750 NHS building projects with a value of £1 million or more. Statistics conceal many things, but it is worth saying that the amount of funding for the building programme—for capital investment schemes—has gone up 66 per cent., or two thirds, since 1979. The record of the previous five-year Labour Government was a cut of no less than 28 per cent., taking inflation into consideration.

In Hemel Hempstead—metaphorically, if not literally, down the road from my constituency—the last Labour Government cancelled the new hospital building programme. Since 1979, that programme has been restored and has been more or less completed. As has been mentioned, Barnet has been waiting for a new hospital for 50 years under successive Governments. It was about to go ahead and was then cancelled by the health Minister in the last Labour Government. At long last it has gone ahead and phase 1A of the redevelopment of Barnet general hospital, costing £33 million, is due to open next month.

I do not want to sound complacent, but I believe that, all in all, the Government's record is commendable and is a good record on which to build. Of course there have been problems. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) mentioned the escalating demand for treatments, which has hugely increased, and the aging population. Another factor is the cost of new medical technology. In short, we have been spending more on the NHS, but we need to spend an ever-increasing amount because the population is getting older. By definition, the very young and the very old need NHS services relatively more than others. An increasing number of treatments and new types of operation are being introduced, which are very expensive indeed. There are tremendous challenges ahead.

As I admitted, there are failures from time to time. I know of a lady who went into hospital not once, not twice, but three times for an operation. The matter is the subject of an inquiry at the moment. Before she could have her operation, she needed pre-medical treatment which could be carried out only immediately before she had the operation, not a few weeks before. She received the pre-medical attention, but it was then found that a bed was not available—probably because a more urgent case had come in. The hospital was not in my local health authority but in the next-door health authority. I am confident that those who run those services will learn from that failure.

The best-laid plans go wrong. We may find that the weekend of 3 January to 5 January 1997 was the worst weekend for the national health service in its 50-year history, for many reasons. First, there always appears to be an increase in the number of people needing attention immediately after the Christmas period. There has been a flu epidemic, at least in my part of the country, and it is a sad fact of life that not only patients but nurses get flu, so there have been fewer nurses. The health authority tried to foresee that eventuality and plan for it, but the scale of the problem beat it.

Secondly, the question has been asked, why could not agency nurses be used? People choose to be agency nurses because they do not want to work full time as a nurse. They want time off, perhaps when their children are on holiday from school. That has been the problem and it must be overcome.

At least we have created and implemented a mechanism whereby people can complain. It is known as the citizens charter or, in this respect, the patients charter. We have therefore encouraged people to complain. We have set benchmarks for standard and adequate treatments and I hope that we can tighten those because 18 months is far too long to wait even for non-urgent treatment. That is a challenge to us all.

I want to try to counter what I believe to be the unjustified charge that has been brought by many people: that although we may be spending more on our NHS, far too much is spent on too many administrators. I have tried, albeit as a layman, to make a study of that subject in my locality. I take the opportunity to quote, not a politician, but Barnet's director of public health. In his 1996 report he says:

"In fact, we"—

he is referring to the nation, not Barnet—

"spend less on management than any equivalent health service in the world."

If it is true that, as I believe, we are spending more today on management than we were a few years ago, that is not necessarily a bad thing. My local inquiries show that, in contrast with today, there was far too little financial accountability and much waste before we instituted our NHS reforms. I am not a qualified accountant, but I was appalled at the attitude in the Barnet health authority of yesteryear. I suppose that it was not unlike most other health authorities, as it expected to receive slightly more money every year without attempting to justify the increase by showing that existing funds were being spent cost-effectively, or that the increase would be used cost-effectively.

The Government have taken a lead in trying to reduce unnecessary or—I had better be careful—partly unnecessary bureaucratic costs. We abolished the area

health authorities in the early 1980s; we have recently abolished the 12 regional health authorities; we have merged the district health authorities and family health services associations; and I understand that we have reduced the central costs of the Department of Health.

That appears to be a pretty significant beginning, but the main argument against that would be that there are more managers at the sharp end—at district health authority level. I have inquired into that issue and want to make some points regarding my local health authority. The first is the obvious and important point in respect of clerical staff, not managers: I would prefer to have more clerical staff if that meant that consultants, doctors and members of allied professions working in the NHS could spend more of their time concentrating on their medical skills. It is not the number of managers or clerical staff that counts, but the amount of work that they do or that we expect them to do.

In Barnet, nearly half of those categorised as administrators or clerical staff work within clinical directorates, so they are probably not administrators but nurses. The question is: is a nurse manager a nurse or an administrative controller? In Barnet, they are mainly involved in nursing, but they look after some administrative control.

The proportion of NHS staff in Barnet who are administrators or clerical staff is slightly higher than in other health authorities. We have a slightly higher proportion of doctors and members of allied professions than do other health authorities, but that is because the acute services delivered by our health authority are provided on two separate sites, so more people are needed.

That leads me to comment on what may have been one of the most controversial decisions taken in our local health authority. The decision has assumed national proportions and was mentioned in an earlier intervention. This was the decision to close the accident and emergency department at Edgware general hospital to concentrate services on one site at Barnet. The Barnet site will be provided with an enlarged accident and emergency department, which is included in phase 1A. Why did the health authority make that proposal? Why did the then regional health authority and the then Secretary of State agree to it?

My view of this controversial matter is coloured by one of the most shocking statistics I have ever read. It came not from a politician but in a report issued a few years ago by the Royal College of Surgeons. It said that one in four deaths in accident and emergency departments are avoidable. As soon as I heard that, I made further inquiries. The statistic was confirmed in a report by Dr. Richard Warren, who examined the hospitals in what used to be the north-west Thames region. He came to the conclusion that there were 86 deaths a year in that area that could have been prevented but for the then prevalent structures for delivering A and E care.

Another shocking set of statistics comes from the British Orthopaedic Association, which has stated in a report that one in five patients are inadequately treated after major surgery in our A and E departments, and that one in eight are left with a severe avoidable disability.

The political problem lies in the fact that there is a popular misconception that any A and E department can deal with any accident or emergency. That is not true and it never has been. The problem at Barnet general hospital and Edgware general hospital is that the acute services are provided on two sites about four miles apart, so there has never been adequate consultant cover. By concentrating the new, enlarged A and E facilities on one site, I have no doubt that lives will be saved.

It is of course difficult to persuade anyone living in the shadow of Edgware general hospital that the local health service will be improved by closing the local A and E department—indeed, I cannot prove that it will be, but from listening to expert medical opinion I am sure that the health service will be improved by the change. Not only will there be better A and E facilities, with more consultant cover, but there will be better ambulance cover, with two extra ambulance points in the Edgware region. People will be taken more quickly by ambulance to the new hospital as a result. What is more, every blue-light ambulance in my area carries, as of recently, a paramedic. I am told that the critical factor when dealing with a serious injury is not the time it takes for an ambulance to get to the A and E department but the time it takes before the person injured is stabilised by a paramedic on board a blue-light ambulance. I therefore urge the residents of the borough of Barnet and beyond who have hitherto depended on the A and E department at Edgware carefully to consider whether the new service will not be much better. I am convinced that they will find that it will.

To those who are still sceptical about the plan I would point out that the current out-patient and daycare services will continue at Edgware general hospital, and that about 75 per cent. of the sort of A and E cases that currently go to Edgware will continue to be served by that hospital. Only the more serious accident and emergency cases will be sent to Barnet—or if not Barnet, then to Northwick Park or the Royal Free, which are two relatively close hospitals. A minor injuries unit has already been set up at Edgware and other services will be developed on the site, such as services for the mentally ill and the elderly.

I believe that the delivery of hospital and medical services must adapt to changing medical technology.

Mr. Booth: Does my hon. Friend agree that what is planned for the Barnet and Edgware hospitals will continue the success already delivered by the switching of serious cases from Finchley Memorial hospital to Barnet general, while our local hospital was kept open to serve the whole community in other ways?

Sir Sydney Chapman: My hon. Friend knows much more than I do about Finchley Memorial hospital, but I know he is correct. Moreover, he nicely anticipates my concluding remarks.

We fail the people of our country if we do not ensure that the delivery of health services takes into account increasing changes in medical technology. Those changes will mean decisions being taken that are, at least initially, unpopular. I presume to speak only for my own bailiwick and not for other parts of the country. I want to give Barnet health authority's members and the Wellhouse NHS trust a public accolade—they have received precious few tributes from anyone else—for having the courage to go for this new form of health delivery. I also pay tribute to the former regional health authority and to the former Secretary of State for agreeing to the plan.

The safest political option is always to leave things as they are, with a little more money all round for every part of the health service. We ought to be more sophisticated

[Sir Sydney Chapman]

than that. Next month, phase 1A of the redevelopment of Barnet general hospital opens, with an enlarged state-of-the-art A and E department and new maternity, gynaecological and obstetrics wards. I am even told that it has the largest day surgery unit of any hospital in Europe.

Phase 1B is to go ahead shortly; I hope for an announcement in the near future. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and urge him to make that announcement as soon as possible and certainly no later than the new phase 1A opens next month.

6.37 pm

Mr. Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): Listening carefully to the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), I had the impression of a national health service being painted in rosy hues in the abstract, but whenever he moved from the abstract, or national, level to local examples, he seemed to reveal problems in his local health service. I want to deal with the particular this evening, not the abstract. I should like to describe some of the issues surrounding the health service in Wakefield district in my constituency.

The health service in Wakefield is in a state of crisis. The Secretary of State has said that we are bitching, carping and being negative in these debates. I say that we are describing reality. I want to describe what actually happens in Wakefield, not to paint an ideological picture of the NHS.

Incidentally, I pay tribute to the many practitioners in the health service who are struggling to do their best, often with great dedication and always with enthusiasm and commitment to the health service and to the principles of patient care. They work within a complex structure and must manage a difficult financial regime.

The information that I shall present to the House has been provided to me by practitioners in the local health service. It will therefore give an accurate picture as presented to me by administrators and clinicians, rather than a gloss that a politician might wish to put on the local health service.

According to the director of finance of the local health authority, the health service in the Wakefield area is facing a £5.8 million shortfall in funding. Such a figure is easily said, but the cuts that will have to be made in the next year will impact directly on the levels of patient care that my constituents and those of other hon. Members will have to put up with.

We have already heard about the effects of the iniquitous formula by which NHS money is distributed across the country. I shall spend some time describing how inequitably one element in the formula operates. I refer to the market forces factor—MFF—built into the formula whereby money is distributed across the nation. Hon. Members know the background to the MFF, so I shall not go into that. I shall concentrate instead on the impact of the MFF on Wakefield which, as I said, already faces a shortfall of almost £6 million in the next financial year.

I read from a letter sent to me by the chief executive of Wakefield health authority, who states that the impact in Wakefield will be significant,

"in that if the Market Forces Factor did not exist the funding arrangements to Wakefield would see its target allocation increase by approximately £7m, which would put us below target rather than 3.34 per cent. above target."

Wakefield has the second lowest MFF in the NHS—only that of Rotherham is lower.

If one compares the MFF of Wakefield with that of the Westminster and the Kensington and Chelsea health authorities, the result is remarkable: those London health authorities receive 25 per cent. more than Wakefield. The explanation is that the MFF is calculated on the assumption that Wakefield is a low-wage economy. The health service in Wakefield is penalised through the sum that the formula allocates to the area, because our wages are supposedly so much lower than those of the Westminster and the Kensington and Chelsea health authorities.

According to the director of finance for Wakefield health authority, the MFF

"is calculated largely based on the fact that Wakefield has a low wage economy and should therefore be able to pay NHS staff at lower rates than elsewhere."

The director of finance goes on to point out that it is not possible to reduce local pay rates until a system of local pay bargaining is fully implemented. At that point, it might be possible to adjust relative pay rates. At present, 90 per cent. of staff in the health service are paid according to nationally negotiated conditions. The wages of the remaining 10 per cent. are the only element that local health service managers can manipulate in order to secure the differential that they are supposed to introduce in their funding.

I consider it an obscenity to suggest that a nurse, doctor, cleaner or administrator who is doing precisely the same job in almost identical conditions in Wakefield as in Westminster should be paid less. If we reflect on that for a moment, we shall see the immorality of introducing market forces arguments into NHS funding arrangements. Even if one accepts that, which I do not, it is impossible for the local health service to achieve the required reductions, given the fact that staff wages and conditions are negotiated nationally.

As a consequence, the health service in Wakefield has been given a target allocation some £5 million less than the allocation that it ought to receive in the next financial year. On top of the £6 million-worth of cuts that it is expected to make, the health service faces the objective of a £5 million reduction in funding.

In addition to suffering the inequities of the funding formula, Wakefield has been at the forefront—it has almost been used as an experiment—of other health reforms pioneered by the Government, which have had a serious and deleterious effect on the health service in our area. I refer in particular to fundholding practices. Until recently, the Wakefield district had twice the national average number of GP fundholders. Now we have reached 100 per cent: every single GP in the Wakefield district is a fundholder.

I am not opposed to the idea that GPs should have a leading role in determining the general pattern and structure of the health service. What worries me is that the extent to which fundholding has been introduced in Wakefield has resulted in an unplanned and non-strategic approach to health care provision. We are witnessing the emergence of small hospitals that carry out operations and provide other services that would normally be provided by the two general hospitals at Pinderfields and Pontefract.

Work is increasingly being taken away from the two general hospitals and provided in local hospitals established by GP fundholders. In my constituency,

a GP practice that is really a small hospital employs almost 100 staff. It purchases specialist and consultant care outwith the district. Consequently, the funding of the two general hospitals is being cut away, almost like a salami being sliced. The money available to the two hospitals is being reduced.

Anecdotes are passed round the district. Patients tell me that they have experience of GP fundholders sending patients by taxi from my constituency as far as Rochdale, for minor operations. A patient told me that he was sent by taxi to Manchester airport by a GP fundholder and flown to Glasgow for a relatively minor operation. The local general hospitals, which already face serious problems as a result of the underfunding of the local health service, face additional financial problems.

I am aware of GP fundholders in my constituency who are not only building small hospitals, but developing leisure centres with swimming pools and leisure activities, using the surpluses generated by savings in health care provision to local patients. Apart from the fact that patients are being taken away, so income to the local hospitals is being lost, I am worried that in the long term, that will affect local health care provision.

Today, an orthopaedic specialist told me that his local GP fundholding practice had acquired its own X-ray machines. Those X-ray machines were then serviced by consultants who had been brought in from outwith the district. When they looked at the X-ray machines, they found that they were inadequate for diagnostic work and therefore for the requirements of both consultants and patients. The orthopaedic and other consultants whom I met this morning told me to say that they are worried sick about the future of the health service in the Wakefield area.

It is clear from all that that the two general hospitals, Pontefract and Pinderfields, are under great financial stress as a result of both the formula, which is unfair to Wakefield, and the ridiculous experiments in relation to GP fundholding. The number of beds in our area has declined almost cataclysmically. In the Northern and Yorkshire region, the number of general and acute beds has declined by 20 per cent. As a result of that and of other processes, an increasing number of patients are suffering the anxiety of being taken almost to the operating theatre and then having their operation cancelled. In the last quarter, almost 2,000 patients in the Northern and Yorkshire area suffered the difficult and traumatic indignity of having their operation cancelled at the last moment. In the Wakefield area alone, more than 350 patients in the past year have had that experience. The hospitals in the Wakefield area are under siege because of a financial regime that declines year on year, an inequitable and unfair formula and the fact that the fundholding experiment has been taken to an extreme in our district.

For all those reasons, the rosy picture painted earlier is ridiculous when we look at what is happening in practice in areas such as mine. It is hardly surprising that almost one in two adults resident in my constituency signed a petition, which I presented in the Chamber a few weeks ago, opposing further changes in the health service. Almost one in four adults in the whole of Wakefield signed that petition. I could have predicted that, within days—not even weeks—the Secretary of State would reject the advice of tens of thousands of the constituents of hon. Members from the Wakefield district and decide to proceed with his proposals to merge the two hospitals.

If I am carping or being negative, I plead guilty. I believe that I am accurately describing the position in my area.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): My hon. Friend and I share the same health authority area, and Pinderfields hospital, to which he referred, is in my constituency. Today, we had a meeting to consider the merger between the two trusts. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that we must ensure that the services and resources that are needed for the Wakefield area are made available now that there is to be one trust. The deficit of both hospitals and the area health authority, and the surpluses that apply to the GP fundholders, should be merged so that we have unity of provision in both primary and acute care in the Wakefield area. That is the point that my hon. Friend is making. It is significant and important, and I hope that the Minister will take note.

Mr. Trickett: I thank my hon. Friend for making some telling points about the position in our area.

We live in a complex geographical area with a large number of small townships and village communities spread over a large area. At the moment, health services are provided at both ends of the district. We fear that, because of the cutting process in our area and the downward pressure on finances, as a result of the formula and aggregate expenditure on the health service throughout the nation, we shall end up with a single hospital. Just one hospital in any part of our district cannot serve the whole of our community because of the geographical character of the district, its infrastructure and transport services. We therefore resisted the proposal to unify the health service management, because we believe that the next step is unification of the hospitals and the closure of one or other of them.

All those views are shared perceptively by the overwhelming majority of the fellow citizens in our district, as was shown by the petition that I presented.

6.55 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North–East): I welcome this further opportunity to debate the health service because there is no doubt that the public regard it as the jewel in the crown of public services. The NHS has a good tradition, since its foundation in 1948, of meeting the rising expectations of the public and the demands placed on it.

Why do I say that the health service is a success story? The success is not entirely due to the NHS, but a large part is. Life expectancy has risen—even over the past 18 years, it has increased by a further two years—and, even more important, infant mortality has been halved, but one would not get that impression as a result of listening to some hon. Members' speeches. I argue strongly that the NHS has been and will continue to be a success story.

The NHS has been a success story because of the dedication of its staff and the resources that have been committed to it. Resources have risen by 3 per cent. a year since 1979, in sharp contrast to the period of the last Labour

[Mr. David Congdon]

Government, 1974 to 1979. We now spend £43 billion a year on the NHS—£80,000 a minute or £31 million during this debate.

The sums are large in anybody's language and the key is to ensure that they are well and properly spent. I remind anybody who does not believe that that is the issue of what, as long ago as 1953, the Guillebaud committee stated:

"If the test of adequacy were that the Service should be able to meet every demand which is justifiable on medical grounds, then the Service is clearly inadequate now, and very considerable additional expenditure would be required to make it so . . . In the absence of an objective and obtainable standard of adequacy"—

in other words, what does "adequacy" actually mean?—

"the aim must be to provide the best Service possible within the limits of the available resources".

The resources devoted, rightly and properly, to the NHS have been increased every year—by 75 per cent. in real term since 1979—and, whenever the general election comes, the next Conservative Government are firmly committed to increasing that funding every year in real terms.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) properly reminded the House, health expenditure has risen from 4.7 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1979 to 5.8 per cent. of GDP in 1995-96. That is a significant increase.

Another reason why the public regard the NHS as crucial is that it is there when it is needed. They know that if they are ill, if an emergency occurs, or if they are in an accident, they will receive the best possible care. Even more crucially, the NHS is free at the point of use. If people are knocked down, or have a stroke or heart attack, they know that they will be cared for and will not be presented with a bill afterwards.

It is not and never has been the Conservative party's intention to privatise the NHS. One of the most depressing parts of debates on the NHS for a long time is the continuing attempt—particularly just before a general election, for some reason—to allege that there is a hidden plan to privatise it. If there is—I know that there is not—it has been pretty well hidden for the past 18 years, and especially during the past five years when we have significantly increased NHS expenditure.

The Opposition's motion alleges that

"the National Health Service is not safe in this Government's hands."

I would argue categorically that, looking at the record, it is clearly safe in this Government's hands; but looking at the contrasting record of Labour-controlled local authorities on community care, which is an important part of the NHS, it is certainly not safe in Labour's hands.

Mr. Couchman: Does my hon. Friend remember the mismanagement of the health service in 1978-79? Does he remember the Labour Government, propped up by the Liberal party, abrogating their responsibility to trade union shop stewards?

Mr. Congdon: Yes I do. People were being turned away from hospitals by pickets, who were determining whether someone should receive care. We never want to return to that situation, and my hon. Friend is quite right to remind us of it.

Having said that the NHS provides an excellent service and is safe in our hands, I recognise that it faces great pressures. That is one reason why the Secretary of State allocated an extra £100 million to deal with bed blocking and for intensive care facilities. Why does the NHS experience great pressure? The answer is obvious: advances in medical science have led to cures that were not available 10 or 15 years ago. More people have heart transplants or bypass operations now. That is a great success.

Demographic change has put great pressure on the NHS. The number of people aged 85 and over increased by nearly 50 per cent. between 1986 and 1996. The NHS dealt very well with the enormous extra pressure that that put on it. We all know that, as people get older, they use more health care. The hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett) mentioned the funding formula, but it is designed to take into account the fact that the elderly put more demands on the health service.

The Secretary of State's document, "The NHS—A Service with Ambitions," which was published recently, made it clear that we are over the period of greatest growth in the number of over-85s. Over the next decade—1996 to 2006—the increase will be only 12 per cent. Just in case hon. Members think the percentages confusing, in absolute terms there was a 300,000 increase in the number of over-85s in the decade just finished, and the increase will be 110,000 in the coming decade. That is an important point. I would argue categorically that the NHS can and will cope with the demands that will be placed on it over the next decade and further into the future.

Not enough research has been done on this, but there has been a significant increase in the number of emergency admissions. A number of reasons are given, but there is no firm conclusion. At my local district general hospital, the Mayday Healthcare NHS trust, during December, there was an 18 per cent. increase in the number of emergency admissions. That is a lot to cope with. Despite the planning in many hospitals to bring forward elective surgery, which we heard about earlier, it is difficult to cope with demand.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet talked about the number of patients being treated, which has gone up greatly. I draw the House's attention to some figures about specific operations. Compared with 1990-91, there has been a 70 per cent. increase in the number of heart bypass operations, to 22,000. The number of cataract operations has increased by 54 per cent., to 152,000. Hip replacements are up 26 per cent., to 62,000.

All that has been achieved because extra resources have been devoted to the health service, but perhaps as significant is the fact that it has been achieved with a significant decrease in the number of beds. We have not had to increase the number of beds to cater for more people, because the average length of stay has decreased by 60 per cent. since 1970. As we know, a large number of operations—up to 60 or 70 per cent. in many hospitals—are now carried out as day surgery. That is why more people can be treated in a reduced number of beds.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is, as always, making a thoughtful speech. He knows the subject well,

but he has avoided the earlier question, which I now put directly to him. He said that the level of funding for the health service should depend on the amount of resources available. There is another question that any Government or politician should answer: what is the minimum adequate level of health service provision? Does he accept that that question needs to be answered—whether it is expressed as the number of beds or the number of people being treated? One cannot just say that it all depends on resources, otherwise resources could be cut to 2 per cent. and that would be the answer to the question.

Mr. Congdon: I did not intend to create that impression, although I readily concede that it is very difficult to say what is adequate. There are various measures. It would be possible to look at waiting lists, which we touched on earlier. The average waiting time has come down from nine months to about four. That is a significant improvement. If people—particularly those who need, say, a hip replacement—have to wait nine months, a year, or even longer, that is too long, so for them the service would be inadequate.

I start from the assumption that we are spending a certain amount today. As additional resources become available because of growth in the economy, it is absolutely right and proper to devote additional resources, in real terms, to the NHS. That is why I warmly welcome the Government's commitment to continue to increase resources year on year. The percentage should reflect the adequacy of the service, the pressures that are known to be on the service, and the resources that are available. It is obviously important, therefore, that the economy is run well, as it is today—with falling unemployment and the like—to ensure that we have the resources to devote to the NHS.

Before fundholding was introduced, the criticism was that, if they were given a budget, fundholding GPs would deny treatment to some patients because they would use up too much of their budget and that there was a financial incentive so to do. That was the original scare.

Fundholding has come in; by 1 April, 60 per cent. of the population will be covered by fundholding GPs. We now hear the opposite allegation: that, by using their money better than health authorities, GPs are buying an improved service for their patients. I have always had a simplistic response, for which I make no apology. The challenge is to ensure that all patients receive the same benefits as patients of fundholders; the easiest way to do that is for all doctors to become fundholding GPs.

The Labour party has made great play of local commissioning, but there is great fear among fundholding GPs that local commissioning will be only a talking shop and that the real power will remain with consultants in hospitals. Fundholders value fundholding so highly because it gives them the leverage to put pressure on the system to improve. The key is to try to avoid a stagnant system; to try to ensure that a part of it leads to improvement. Fundholders have been leading that improvement.

I shall say a few words about the reformed health service. At the last general election, it was quite easy to spread all sorts of scare stories about how ineffective the reformed system would be. There was much rhetoric that was not quite in line with what we now know the service is delivering. I argue strongly that the key part of the health service reforms, over and above the issue of fundholding GPs, is the role of the health authorities. They play a key role in determining the health needs of their population and ensuring that they buy care to meet those needs.

Most health authorities have found it quite hard to meet those new responsibilities. They have had to negotiate, which they had not had to do before. They have had to produce contracts, a procedure that they had not engaged in before. Some of them are so immersed in doing that that they have not been able to concentrate enough on the real indicators of health in their communities and on buying the appropriate care.

I shall not be satisfied until I can see exactly what is being bought in Croydon, Bromley, Barnet or anywhere else for, let us say, the elderly in terms of hip replacements—an important operation that improves people's mobility and reduces pain. I defy hon. Members to ascertain from the purchasing plans of their health authorities how many such operations they are buying. The figure will probably be submerged in a much broader heading that may have a financial tag but no details about what is being bought.

The Health Committee is examining children's health. Purchasing plans should contain figures showing what sort of care and mental health service are being bought for children. The challenge is to ensure that health authorities can get to grips with those issues and buy the appropriate amount of care in conjunction with fundholders.

Much nonsense has been spoken about the purchaser-provider split. It has been said that it is a vicious, competitive market in which hospitals bid against each other and that it is designed to do them out of business. That is too crude an assessment of what in practice is much more a managed market. The reason for the purchaser-provider split is simply to try to bring pressure to bear on those parts of the NHS that are failing to deliver good quality care and good value for money. There should be dialogue between the purchaser and the provider about improving what they offer, otherwise the old practices will continue. The service certainly needed managing and it is important that purchasers and providers co-operate and work in partnership. That is the key.

The next matter with which I shall deal is even more important than organisation; clinical effectiveness. What do hospitals deliver? How do they deliver it? Do they deliver it well? Does the patient stand a better chance of surviving in hospital A, B or C? This is a controversial issue. Are the surgeons and consultants in a particular hospital up to date with modern practices, or are they out of date and therefore carrying out inappropriate procedures? The Select Committee inquired into resource allocation and purchasing in these areas and what came through loud and clear was that variations in the quality of care and in the number of procedures carried out are such that they would lead anyone to conclude that more work needs to be done on clinical effectiveness. I am encouraged by the fact that doctors are now taking the lead on that issue. In the past, managers said, "You must improve. Why do you take 10 days on a procedure when other hospitals can do it in two?" Now, doctors are asking such questions.

[Mr. Congdon]

The Select Committee inquired into tonsillectomy and grommets. I asked a parliamentary question on tonsillectomy. I understand that, in the past 30 years, the number of such operations has reduced, but I was surprised by the answer to my question—that tonsillectomies have increased in the past five years. Perhaps in the interests of clinical effectiveness, that should be examined further.

Much good work is being led by the chief medical officer. The famous Calman report into cancers showed that if a surgeon saw only a few patients with a certain type of cancer each year, the outcome for his patients was not good. It is important to have cancer units of a size that enables doctors to see enough patients to keep their experience up to date and ensure quality care.

I spoke about local authorities failing in their responsibilities on community care. This is a serious issue. Local authorities clamoured loudly to have such responsibilities and they have borne them as badly as possible by insisting on buying places in their own facilities, keeping them full and deliberately avoiding sending clients who need residential care into the private sector. It is absurd that people who would be better off in residential care are given expensive intensive domiciliary care. If people want that it is a different matter, but I suspect that many would prefer to go into residential care, although that is not appropriate for everyone. The authorities must get their act together.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The hon. Gentleman mentions inefficient local authorities. Why is Conservative-controlled Cheshire deeply bitter about the Government's funding of social services? It has enormous problems in meeting statutory obligations. How is it to make progress in the current financial situation?

Mr. Congdon: I shall not risk commenting on the situation in Cheshire.

Mr. Miller: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is efficient?

Mr. Congdon: I do not know, but it is clear that local authorities could save between £400 million and £700 million a year by transferring their homes as going concerns to the private, voluntary sector—but they will not do that because of dogma. If they did, the money that would be released could pay for more places in the private sector or on domiciliary care, depending on clients' needs, which would result in better service. That is the challenge facing local authorities.

Mr. Couchman: Did my hon. Friend see the report in *The Daily Telegraph* on Tuesday which stated that, in 1994-95, the average charge for an elderly person in a council residential home was £283 a week, compared with an average of £246 a week in the private sector, and that that gap has widened?

Mr. Congdon: I saw that report. It is staggering that those figures were for 1994-95. The difference is so enormous as to be almost unbelievable. My hon. Friend is right to say that the gap is undoubtedly widening. It is ironic that local authorities say that they are short of funds, but are prepared to spend a great deal on upgrading their homes rather than pass the care responsibility to the private, voluntary sector.

The hon. Member for Hemsworth spoke about the funding formula, which is an important means of distributing funds on the basis of need. The Health Committee conducted a detailed investigation into the matter and, although there will always be arguments about where the improvements should be, there have been further improvements to the formula. I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment further to improve the formula and to target it better. There is always room for improvement, but I think that the formula is heading in the right direction.

It is significant that Labour has nothing to offer the people on the national health service. All I have gleaned from Labour is that it will destroy fundholding, which is one part of the reforms that is working well. I am not sure who that will benefit. No one knows how commissioning will work and the Opposition have many questions to answer about why they want to destroy fundholding. It is a success. Why not build on it? The Conservative party has run the NHS for most of the 50 years of its existence and has a good record on it. I hope that, after the election, Conservatives will still be running it—into the next millennium and doing as well in the next century as it has in this.

7.18 pm

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): I shall raise some health service issues that are of interest in my constituency. I should like to address two aspects of our motion: the continuing deterioration of the national health service, especially as it relates to acute services, and the highest ever number of people awaiting treatment.

Debates on the NHS are usually pretty bad tempered, and show clear differences between the two sides, as Conservative Members defend the treatment that the Government have meted out to the health service in the past 18 years, and we raise the concerns of our constituents about the treatment that they have received from the health service. The contributions of the right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) and the hon. Members for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) and for Croydon, North–East (Mr. Congdon) were thoughtful, and I do not disagree with much of what was said. I particularly enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet, because he is obviously concerned about the closure of the accident and emergency department of the hospital in his constituency, and the effect that will have on his constituents. I am not sure whether he is retiring at the next election: I hope that he is staying on.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): No.

Mrs. Kennedy: He is retiring.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): No, he is not retiring.

Mrs. Kennedy: He is staying on. I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. Perhaps his electorate will retire him. He could learn a great deal from the experiences of my constituents with the closure of the accident and emergency unit at the Broadgreen hospital.

The Government's amendment repeatedly uses pious words. It says that the Government are

"committed to"

and express their

"support for",

and it

"welcomes the Government's commitment to a growing budget".

Why do the Government stress their commitment three times in a relatively short amendment to the motion? I believe that it is a fundamental question of trust. Do the British people believe what the Conservatives say about the health service? If they do not, does that mean that the Government have lost the public's confidence over their handling of the health service? I believe that, because of their experiences of health service treatment, and especially the experience of their elderly relatives, the public no longer have confidence in the Government and do not trust them with the NHS.

Patients in the accident and emergency department of the Royal Liverpool university hospital know that the health service is in crisis, because they are told regularly—not just in an isolated crisis—by nurses and medical staff that they must contact their Members of Parliament to effect a change. They know that it is an on-going crisis and not just momentary, and that the Government are failing to address it. Despite the thoughtfulness of the speeches of Conservative Members, they do their case no good if they dismiss our arguments and ignore the experiences of our constituents.

I have a tale of two hospitals. Part one is the story of Broadgreen hospital, which is now part of a merged trust. My hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett) expressed concern about merged trusts in the geographical area that serves his constituency. Broadgreen Hospital NHS trust was merged with the Royal Liverpool University Hospital NHS trust. At the time of the last general election, Broadgreen was a district general hospital and was directly managed by the health authority. In 1988, it was proud to announce the provision of 11 wards in the new Alexander wing, which were opened by Her Royal Highness Princess Alexandra. Now only six wards remain. That gives the House some idea of the effect of the health service reforms on my constituency.

Four NHS trusts operate on that hospital site: four different units managing independent health service trusts. That leads to chaos and bureaucracy, and it is visible to everyone who visits the site. What does it mean when wards are closed? When those five wards were closed, it was not just beds that were lost; teams of staff from each of those wards were disbanded, and posts were deleted from the establishment of medical and nursing staff.

It is to the great discredit of the current management that the decision just before Christmas to close a 20-bed ward in Broadgreen—this information has been widely published, so it is not new—was communicated to the staff on the ward at 3.30 pm on the Friday afternoon when the nurse in charge was on leave and was unaware that the decision was to be made. Nurses had to tell patients that they were to be transferred within the hour. I leave hon. Members to imagine the chaos. It greatly distressed the patients who were moved, and it caused their relatives great anxiety. An investigation was held and an apology given, but that does not change the fact that chaos was caused and we lost a further ward.

In 1988, that accident and emergency department was one of four directly managed units, as they were then called—the jargon has now changed—in the Merseyside region. In 1996, it was finally closed, despite fierce local opposition and fears that the remaining accident and emergency departments would be unable to cope. It is a pity that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet is no longer present. My constituents were promised brand new, state-of-the-art accident and emergency departments at three other major hospitals across the region. We were assured over and again that they would be able to cope with patients who would previously have gone to Broadgreen, and that we had nothing to fear.

One improvement that followed the closure of that accident and emergency unit was the introduction of paramedics in ambulances. Merseyside was one of the first regions in the country to ensure that every ambulance that left the depot had a paramedic on board. The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet is right: that unquestionably reduces the number of deaths. Merseyside is to be applauded and congratulated.

We were also promised that alongside the closure of the accident and emergency unit at Broadgreen would be improvements in primary care. New primary treatment units were developed, one of which was close to the hospital. They were designed to deal with what we would parochially call the walking wounded—people who were not seriously ill but needed urgent medical treatment, and could face lengthy delays in the big accident and emergency departments. Those people could go to a primary treatment unit, where they would be treated by nurses and, if necessary, a GP would be on hand to examine a patient. Unfortunately, that experiment has not worked. Primary treatment units quickly changed their role, as patients continued to go to the major accident and emergency departments for the treatment of both major and minor injuries.

I said that this was a tale of two hospitals, and I now come to part two. The Royal Liverpool university hospital now has the long title of the Royal Liverpool university hospital, Liverpool and Broadgreen: it is two hospitals merged under one management unit. It is one of only eight teaching hospitals outside London, and is highly regarded within the medical profession: it leads the field in some specialties. A new accident and emergency department opened in August 1995. Shortly before it opened, the NHS trust issued a press release, which said:

"The Royal's newly extended unit, due to open at the end of next month, will be one of the largest and best equipped in Europe".

It is strange how that echoes the words of the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet. The press release said that the unit would have

"80 nursing staff compared to the present complement of 50.

10 senior and middle grade medical staff, one more than the current level.

Six resuscitation bays with state-of-the-art equipment, including four with built-in x-ray."

That is a superb facility. If I were critically ill and needed resuscitation, I would want to be taken straight to that unit, because I would receive the best treatment available in the north-west. It would have a 30-bed short-stay assessment unit, 13 major treatment cubicles, a large minor injuries unit capable of treating 100,000 new patients a year and staff accommodation, including bedrooms for on-call doctors so that fully qualified medical staff were available at all times.

[Mrs. Kennedy]

As we were to have the biggest and best accident and emergency facilities in Europe, how is it that, just 18 months later, the BBC regional television news programme "Close Up North" presented a half-hour programme from that very accident and emergency department with nursing staff describing the conditions as "like Bosnia"?

On 6 January 1997, Liverpool health authority put out another press release:

"The Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals are currently facing considerable pressures resulting from an unprecedented increased number of patients who are presenting for admission. These problems have meant there are prolonged waiting times for admission to the hospital and also that some patients are having to be cared for in emergency designated patient areas."

It then listed four measures taken early in January in an attempt to address the problems. Sadly, the Secretary of State has suggested that it is another case of BSE—blame somebody else—and that, if accident and emergency departments or hospitals are unable to cope, it must be because they are badly managed units or trusts.

The press release continued:

"All these measures have been implemented without an increase in the staff establishment and thus we recognise the great contribution that all our staff are making to the position. Nurses in the Training, Quality, Specialist Nursing and other departments have all volunteered to help in the care of emergency admissions."

That is to be applauded, although the authority states that, as a consequence,

"courses may have to be temporarily suspended. Medical Staff have reconfigured on call duty and are particularly hard pressed and elective surgery remains deferred."

Elective surgery had already been deferred for several months, and it remains deferred to date.

Shortly after that television programme, which was screened across the north-west of England, I received a letter from a member of staff at the Royal Liverpool hospital, who wrote:

"The recent publicity about the Royal Liverpool Hospital . . . featured on BBC North West has prompted me to speak up. I have worked for the last ten years at the hospital and I have never seen staff morale so low . . . There have always been patients having to wait for long periods in A & E. This is nothing new but the closure of the A & E at Broadgreen has made it much worse. Surely what has happened could have been predicted?"

It was predicted repeatedly, by medical staff, patients, the community health councils and others. The letter continued:

"I used to be proud to work at the hospital but no more. We are not providing safe patient care any more with patients being moved in the middle of the night because heir beds are needed."

The letter ended with a challenge:

"The politicians need to call for an enquiry to expose and sort this mess out for the sake of the patients and the staff."

The right hon. Member for Wealden described such comments as bitching. I took offence at that and raised the matter with him. He also referred to scaremongering. The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet said that one of his constituents had to wait an unacceptable time for admission to hospital.

If they were only isolated incidents, I would be more than happy to raise them on a case-by-case basis with the local trust, the local health authority and, if necessary, in a particularly bad case, with the Minister concerned. Unfortunately, they are not isolated incidents. It is an on-going and regular problem. It is so serious that the outpost of the NHS executive in the North West region commissioned a report on accident and emergency units in the region. I quoted from the introduction earlier and I wish to quote some more of its findings, particularly as they relate to a matter that was raised by the hon. Member for Croydon, North–East—community care and moving patients into primary care beds.

In page 5 of his report to Alan Langlands on emergency care in the North West region, published last August, Robert Tinston found:

"A separate and independent pattern of emergency admissions could be observed".

He was talking about patients with non-specific illnesses that were quite difficult to diagnose who might have to wait some time before their treatment could be determined. He continued:

"Increases are particularly high in Liverpool and Sefton but scarcely significant at all in Wirral, Manchester and Salford. The pattern appears to related to the interaction between NHS Primary and Secondary Care and the Social Services Department and independent continuing care providers."

The report continued:

"Across the North West in December through to February 1995/96 approximately, 600 beds were blocked by people awaiting assessment and a nursing home place at any one time. Many Providers have stated that they expect this figure to increase in 1996/97, as they have indicated that certain Social Services have changed their eligibility criteria and/or their administrative arrangements in order to reduce their expenditure to stay within financial constraints."

Here we go again. It is another case of "blame somebody else". This time, it is the fault of the inefficient, ineffective local authority which is deliberately going our of its way to use, in the words of the hon. Member for Croydon, North–East, "expensive" care provided by the local authority rather than the cheaper care provided by the unit. In my experience, that is not the case. It may be that the hon. Gentleman can quote examples, but I can quote back at him cases where local authorities have made great efforts to make residential homes more efficient and effective and to reduce the unit costs without exploiting the nursing and domiciliary staff who provide care within a residential setting.

Mr. Congdon: I can quote two examples. The first was raised in an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), who quoted figures for 1994-95 showing a differential of £50 a week in favour of the private sector. Secondly, Kent university's public research unit has provided figures showing an average cost of some £410 a week for a place in a local authority home and, if my memory serves me right, about £220 a week in the private sector. It is a big differential. That is why I would argue that local authorities do not provide value for money. If that money were freed up, it could provide for more patients.

Mrs. Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman has made an interesting intervention. I listened carefully to the figures that he quoted and I will examine them after the debate. In my experience, however, the social services department in Liverpool effectively uses the independent and private sectors. One organisation, Take Care, provides a superb

level of care. The social services department does not take a dogmatic attitude, but there is a distinct lack of resources. The department cannot use the private and voluntary sectors more, because of Government underfunding.

Bed blocking is only one aspect of the crisis facing our areas. Robert Tinston went on to say:

"As hospitals have closed, they have been replaced with new facilities which recognise modern clinical advances . . . It is becoming increasingly clear that we have removed the bed stock capacity that used to cope with peaks of demand. We see this when we look at towns where rationalisation is yet to take place. They appear to cope for longer."

He was talking about coping with what is described in the health service press release as

"an unprecedented increased number of patients who are presenting for admission"

with problems that were quite unexpected.

The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet should beware. If the rationalisation that took place at Broadgreen takes place in his constituency, his constituents will face the same lengthy waits in undignified and cluttered surroundings as my constituents have at the Royal hospital.

Dr. Tinston made suggestions in his report, some of which would certainly help. He concluded:

"I can give no absolute guarantee that, should pressures be as bad, or worse, than last year, that we would have radical, new and innovative measures in place to deal with them. These take some time to implement."

As I have already said, the BBC report said that this year has been as bad as, if not worse than, last year.

Conservative Members claim to be spending more and more money year on year on the NHS, but such spending must be balanced against the constant reduction in funding of social services and community care through local authorities: one impacts on the other. It is the same old situation. The Government are taking from local authorities to spend on the NHS. Hospitals are not able to discharge patients into community care because of underfunding of social services. Patients are therefore staying in hospital while others are having to wait to be admitted because they cannot get a bed.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. *[Laughter.]* Sorry, the hon. Lady. I do her a disservice. The hon. Lady seems to be suggesting that the Government have cut funding for community care. Nothing could be further from the truth. Money for community care has been increased year after year after year, like health service funding, so that, at the moment, it totals just under £6 billion a year.

Mrs. Kennedy: I am very interested in what the Minister has to say, but I must point out that that community care funding has to deal not only with an aging population but with patients coming out of mental institutions. I shall not go into the problems that we have seen in that area. Resources, particularly those relating to local authorities, are inadequate and have been cut. The Minister is referring to funding as it applies to the health service, but I am talking about funding coming through local government.

Mr. Burns: No, I am talking about money going to local authorities.

Mrs. Kennedy: I listen to what the Minister says. I will take that on board and look at it. If he is right, I shall come back to him and talk to him further, because I would like to explore the issue. It is clear from Dr. Tinston's report on A and E services in the North West region that the problem is widespread. It is not isolated to Merseyside. We ought to return to the issue.

I turn to the subject of waiting lists, which is of particular interest to me. A calender of events was issued to directors of the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS trust in the last week of January. The national diary flagged up that it was expected that NHS waiting list statistics for England—resident based—for 1995-96 would be published on 3 February.

I received a copy of a memo from which my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury has already quoted. I want to take the House back to it, because I believe that it gives the game away. My hon. Friend wrote to the Secretary of State enclosing a copy of the memo, and on 2 February *The Independent on Sunday* quoted not only the memo but other NHS trusts across England that had experienced similar, shall we say, manipulation of the figures.

The memo, which was compiled by the contracts and information department of the Royal trust, says:

"The Trust declared 12-month-plus waiters at the end of the second quarter of 1996-97",

which would have been in September. It continues:

"The figures showed an accurate picture for Urology and for General Surgery . . . in the 12m, 13m and 14m categories"—

only for patients of Liverpool health authority—

"and of other Health Authorities in the 12m category."

But not all patients were declared. The memo says:

"Patients showing in the following categories were not declared in line with the regional request to keep figures as low as possible".

Patients waiting longer than 12 months in the categories of orthopaedic, ophthalmology and ear, nose and throat specialties were not declared anywhere. Patients who had been given a date to go into hospital for treatment were also not declared.

I telephoned a number of trusts around the region and asked them about the average time they would ask the patient to wait having been given a date to come in—how long in advance were patients given. The average time was two weeks. We know that one of the trusts in Coventry was able last year to announce to a fanfare that it had reduced waiting lists to less than nine months, yet, on examination, it was discovered that it had simply issued a date to come in for all its patients who had waited for more than nine months and therefore removed them from the waiting list. That is a sleight of hand, a dishonesty, a distortion of the picture and one of the reasons why people have lost their confidence—if they ever had any—in the way in which the Conservative party manages the health service.

The memo goes on to say:

"The Region have indicated that the figure of 329 declared by the trust in November is very high and have suggested"—

as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury quoted—

"a judicial elimination of the TCI patients."

There can be no interpretation other than that the regional NHS executive was insisting that the managers of the Royal reduced the number on the waiting list simply by the sleight of hand of giving people a date on which to go into hospital.

[Mrs. Kennedy]

The memo is very honest. It goes on to say:

"This elimination of patients with a TCI date is causing problems due to the frequent cancellation of elective work as a result of the bed situation . . . If the Trust accede to Region's request at this point it will face a greater problem in the future as the true position is likely to worsen substantially."

The figures were not published on 3 February—surprisingly. They were published last week. What do we find? Provider units in the North West region have more patients waiting than any other region, and the latest quarter saw a rise of 4,280. That represents more than 25 per cent. of the national increase in that category and was the highest proportionate increase of all regions.

I asked the Secretary of State to confirm whether the figure of 299 waiters declared by the Royal was inclusive of all those waiting for treatment in the orthopaedic, ear nose and throat and ophthalmic specialities to which I referred. He did not answer me. He said that the figures were intended to be a proper statement of the facts. Since recent figures have been published, consultants have complained to Members of Parliament and contested the figures.

The facts have been doctored, manipulated, massaged, amputated—the list of medical metaphors continues. In the words of the memo, there is no doubt that the figures have been subject to "judicious elimination". That calls into question the entire basis of the Government's case.

I echo the call of the member of staff to whom I referred for an inquiry into what has been going on at the Royal Liverpool university hospital, and especially the accident and emergency department. That could be conducted under the aegis of the community health councillors, who are highly regarded locally.

When I visited the cardiothoracic centre in Liverpool, another truth about waiting lists came out. Medical staff are required by the Government's rules to offer treatment to patients based not on clinical need but on who is at the top of the most pressing waiting list, and GP fundholders' patients take priority over other patients.

A great defence has been made of GP fundholding, but because GP fundholders' patients take precedence, the other patients have to wait unacceptably long for treatment. I therefore warmly welcome our proposals to restore GP services by the extension of commissioning. A commissioning pilot in my constituency has been strongly supported by the participating GPs.

The Secretary of State quoted Aneurin Bevan as saying that GPs were to be the gateholders to NHS services. The chair of the local medical committee in Liverpool, Dr. Rob Barnet, said to me that, if we were not careful, hospital services in the future would be on the basis of emergency admission only and that elective work would increasingly be required to be carried out by the private sector.

Real people are affected by the matters that we have been debating. I refer to the case of Mr. James Hartless, who first came to me when he was 73, two years ago. He has been a patient of the cardiothoracic centre in Liverpool for 10 years. He went into the accident and emergency department at the Royal on 18 April 1996. A letter of apology from the department said:

"it is entirely unacceptable that Mr Hartless arrived in the department at 09.30 hours, to be seen and assessed by the Accident and Emergency Senior House Officer within thirty minutes, and then to wait until almost 18.00 hours before being admitted to a ward. On the day in question, the Accident and Emergency Department was extremely busy. On this day the department was so full that every cubicle and trolley space in the Resuscitation Room and on Majors was blocked, and every bed in the Observation Ward and the overflow area was full, and patients were waiting on trolleys in the corridor."

That was not an isolated incident in the middle of winter, with beds blocked by patients with pneumonia: it was in April. The same patient presented at the A and E on three separate occasions in the run-up to July and waited for a combined period of 18 hours for bed space and treatment.

In a letter of 20 September, Mrs. Hartless said:

"We waited 3½ hours for the Doctor to come back to us to tell us the results. This poor Doctor was away somewhere else, that busy, thus resulting in these long hours on a trolley. This is not a complaint but . . . morale is so low that it has to be seen . . . So this is the year of 1996, and I fear for the future.

Sorry about this moan, but I thought I would let you know. Here we take each day as it comes, anxiety is at its peak, but most of all it is my husband's care that is paramount."

Would that Conservative Members thought the same. If patient care is paramount, it is not acceptable for them to dismiss the experiences of patients such as my constituent as mere scaremongering or bitching. That is not the case. We are talking about real people who have experienced real problems with the health service, and it is to Conservative Members' discredit that they dismiss them out of hand.

7.54 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I trust that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) will forgive me if I do not follow very closely her 35 minutes of anecdote from Liverpool.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) nudged me with his comments about the new complaints procedure following the citizens charter. I should declare that my wife has been appointed one of the lay chairs for complaints—an unremunerated position—and has held that post for a year.

I was also prompted by the account from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of how many substantial capital projects are in the pipeline under the private finance initiative. I should mention that the last major national health service scheme that got under the wire under the old capital financing method was a £60 million scheme for the hospital in my constituency, to give us the up-to-date modern 650-bed hospital that we deserve in the Medway towns and which will replace a lot of very outdated, old and worn-out facilities. Construction has been in progress for some months, and we expect to get the new facilities stage by stage over the coming months; we shall be extremely grateful for them.

I want to draw the attention of the House to a sector of health care that receives all too little notice here and on which the policies of the Labour party remain virtually unchanged. I refer to the private sector, which is resourced principally from private medical insurance and has a beneficial impact on the national health service. That sector is under threat from outside financial factors, but also from the Labour party.

Before Opposition Members make the usual cracks from a sedentary position, let me say that I have never paid a medical insurance premium for myself, my wife or

my children. The only private care that any of us receives is my dental treatment. We are, and always have been, NHS patients, believing in the NHS and cherishing the excellent care that we have had from it. Moreover, in view of my diabetes and my wife's very serious episodes of cancer, it seems unlikely that any medical insurer would take us on except at a heavily loaded premium or with substantial exclusions of disease, or both.

Our situation is not irrelevant to what I want to say. I and my family do not, and almost certainly never will, pay medical insurance, but I would go to the wire to defend the rights of those who want to pay premiums in order, as they see it, to receive prompt treatment, to avoid NHS waiting times for non-urgent elective surgery and to be operated on by the consultant of their choice in comfortable hospital accommodation. I am certain that such people, having paid through tax and national insurance their contributions to the NHS, are making a substantial further contribution by paying medical insurance in order to receive treatment outside the NHS or in NHS private hospital wings. They free up NHS resources, to which they would be entitled, for others such as myself who remain fully NHS patients.

Towards the end of the 1980s, the number of people covered by medical insurance is estimated to have reached between 6.6 million and 7.5 million. Those two figures were published in articles in *The Daily Telegraph* on Friday and Saturday last week, and *The Sunday Times* yesterday inclined to the higher figure. Private medical insurance had become a popular feature of many employers' remuneration packages. Indeed, employer schemes probably account for 60 per cent. of all who have cover.

The Government's imaginative decision in the Finance Act 1989 to allow tax relief on medical, though not dental, insurance for those over 60, and for the spouses of those over 60 even if they are not 60 themselves, helped to soften the twin blows of premiums rising with age and having to take over the payment of premiums from company schemes on retirement.

Since 1990, however, the number covered by private health insurance has fallen sharply, to £5.7 million in 1995—a drop of between 1 million and 2 million from the peak. Doubtless there is more than one reason for that, but the core reason is almost certainly sharply rising premiums for benefits that have risen more slowly or even been frozen. Premiums on average are likely to rise by a further 18 per cent. this year, and for elderly subscribers by much more—perhaps as much as 40 per cent. Those increases will be exacerbated by the increase in insurance premium tax from 2.5 per cent. to 4 per cent. in April. That apparently small increase dictated by the Government, however, is as nothing next to the threat by a putative Labour Government to abolish tax relief on premiums paid by the over-60s. If that abolition of tax relief takes place, premiums for the over-60s will increase at a stroke by 30 per cent.—if the relief is lost at the basic rate of 23 per cent.—and for no additional benefit. It is not easy to quantify the figures in pounds and pence because premiums vary so widely between the major providers. Individual providers now offer a range of products, from simple in-patient-only benefits to policies that give generous cover for out-patient and in-patient treatment, even including mental illness.

The number of people covered by medical insurance has fallen, but the amount paid out has risen inexorably. The people who have stopped paying are the relatively younger and healthier subscribers. Those who remain in subscription are the older and less well, who are more likely to claim. Mr. Julian Stainton of the Western Provident Association said this weekend:

"Private medical insurance is becoming a product that only rich, relatively ill people can afford."

He foresees a tightening of the vicious circle, with higher premiums for fewer people, unless steps are taken to break the circle by constraining premiums and attracting back the younger and healthier into subscription.

We should not underestimate the consequences to the NHS of the collapse in the numbers of private subscribers. One in five of all non-urgent operations are now carried out in private hospitals—many are purchased under NHS procedures—and the range of surgery available is much wider than it used to be. The list is no longer made up of varicose veins and hernia repairs. One in five heart bypass operations and one in three hip replacements take place in a private hospital.

It is not difficult to see what a vital contribution private health care under private medical insurance and in private hospitals is making to restrain NHS waiting lists and costs, especially for the late middle aged and elderly. The danger of a further erosion in private medical insurance subscription by the over-60s, catalysed by the withdrawal by Labour of tax relief on premiums, is all too obvious. Hundreds of thousands of patients would be thrown back on to the NHS's already stretched resources. Private patients also pay for drugs and medication, and many of the patients most likely to cease being private patients would be exempt from prescription charges and entitled to free medicine.

In efforts to constrain costs and increase the customer base, providers are trying to offer lower cost packages. One of the key factors is the right of the provider to direct private patients to particular hospitals, but only if the patient would wait longer than six weeks for NHS treatment. The fact that eight out of 10 insurance claims are for less than £500 and nine out of 10 are for less than £1,000—combined with the new restrictive lower cost and lower benefit policies—may act as a further deterrent to private medical insurance subscription. I anticipate that as many as 30 to 50 of the 220 private hospitals could be forced to close. That might appeal to some of the ideologues on the Labour Benches, but it would mean a reduction in the amount of health care available in the United Kingdom.

The present serious decline in private medical insurance subscription could escalate into a full-blown crisis that would have enormous consequences for NHS resources. It is difficult to put a cash figure on such a catastrophe, but hundreds of millions of pounds, perhaps even £1 billion, could be involved. That is close to next year's increase for the whole of the NHS. The spiteful withdrawal of tax relief on medical insurance premiums, on ideological grounds, by a Labour Government exhibiting all the qualities of old Labour is just the catalyst that would bring huge additional costs to the NHS through the defection of subscribers from private medical insurance.

The situation is reminiscent of 1974 when the Labour Secretary of State for Health, Barbara Castle, waged war on private medicine. She managed a unique achievement

[Mr. James Couchman]

in NHS staff relations—simultaneous industrial action by every grade of NHS staff from consultant to porter. I remember attending the opening of my local hospital as a new member of the area health authority in Sidcup. Mrs. Castle made her speech to a totally empty room, because the opening had been boycotted by every member of staff of that hospital.

The mischief wrought on the health service by Mrs. Castle was merely the overture to the shambles over which her successor, David Ennals, presided later during the time the Labour Government were propped up by the Liberals. The House has often been reminded of the appalling circumstances of the winter of discontent, when the Lib-Lab Government abrogated their responsibility to extremist trade union shop stewards who assumed for themselves the power to decide who should be treated.

We heard the usual mixture of cant and shroud-waving today from the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). Those of us who were members of health authorities or held office in local government—as I did, as a chairman of social services—during Labour's time in Government from 1974-79 remember all too well the winter of discontent and the spectacular mismanagement of the health service. We doubt that the Labour party has learnt anything from the experience of 1978-79. The sinister emergence of Unison on television and billboards in the past two days has reinforced our memory of the havoc created by Unison's predecessor, the National Union of Public Employees, during the industrial action of the winter of discontent. The prospect of Unison pulling the strings of a Labour Secretary of State for Health should send shivers down the back of every patient.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury talked at length about waiting lists. What contribution does he think that the abolition of tax relief on private medical insurance premiums for the over-60s would make to shortening waiting times? Several hundreds of thousands of middle-aged and elderly, relatively ill patients would abandon private health care and return to the NHS. That would lead to an explosion of waiting lists, and waiting times would lengthen.

As I said earlier, my family and I are NHS patients. We always have been and probably always will be, but we believe that those who effectively pay twice for their health care help NHS patients to receive treatment sooner. The 5.7 million people still paying for private medical insurance should be encouraged to do so. NHS resources would not then have to be diverted to look after those who would prefer to continue their contribution but could not afford to do so if their premiums rocketed because of unnecessary burdens such as the withdrawal of tax relief.

I hope that the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), when he winds up, will say whether Labour is still determined to cripple private health insurance for the over-60s—the very group of patients most likely to make heavy demands on their health care provider, whether private or NHS. I also look forward to hearing my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People reassure the House that the Government have no plans to abolish the tax relief that was introduced in the Finance Act 1989.

8.7 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I understand the points made by the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) about help for private health care although I, too, rely on the national health service as most people do. I apologise for not being present for the opening speeches today, but I was detained in my constituency by a visit from the Secretary of State for National Heritage. While she was in my constituency, she met young people in care, whose voices should be heard. The Children Act 1989 and the recent Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 gave such young people an opportunity to make their voices heard.

I listened with care to the speech of the hon. Member for Croydon, North–East (Mr. Congdon). He spoke about the private sector and urged the closing of statutory homes. In terms of provision for young people in care, there has been a tendency in Northern Ireland—this has been reflected in other parts of the United Kingdom—to close statutory homes, and we must acknowledge that voluntary homes have been withdrawn from that sector. We should not rush down that road because we need specific homes available—particularly in the statutory sector—for young people in care.

Mention has been made of referrals to nursing homes. There is concern in some parts of Northern Ireland—a particular example in County Down comes to mind—that private nursing homes which have provided excellent care for a number of years have not had a referral from the statutory sector for several years. I am aware of a recent example where a family was interested in the County Down home, but the social worker concerned recommended another home. That raises the concept of discrimination.

Speaking of discrimination, I recognise that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was a major step forward by the Government. However, I must put it on record that disabled people still feel that the very nature of the Act discriminates against them when compared with other legislation dealing with discrimination. I wonder whether the real problem might be discrimination against white males who are disabled as it seems that the commission dealing with disabled people has fewer teeth than those dealing with racial or sex discrimination. We are at an early stage, but disabled people demand that the commission be given teeth now.

In the short time available, I wish to consider several aspects within Northern Ireland. Reference has been made to the rationalisation of health provision, and particularly to the Calman report on cancer services. In taking evidence, the Select Committee on Health has heard the argument time and again that it is better to have surgeons who regularly perform a large number of operations, as they are more successful than others. I have queried that statement for several reasons. First, how does one get experience if one does not operate? In addition, one report has suggested that surgeons who operate on fewer patients have a higher success rate.

Some experienced surgeons—with undoubted gifts in making clinical judgments—have decided that they could give a patient a 50:50 chance of several years of reasonable health by operating when the patient might otherwise have had just two or three months if no operation were carried out. As a result, some of those surgeons have a higher casualty rate than those who prefer

to keep their hands clean by not taking such risks. One therefore cannot jump to the conclusion that because a surgeon does an operation more often his success rate will necessarily be greater.

In taking evidence, the Committee heard about maternity provision around Bath, and we discovered that a high proportion of hospital care was provided by smaller units. In every one of those units we found a tremendous sense of satisfaction. It was interesting that a pregnant woman presenting herself to a small unit who—after examination by a gynaecologist and an obstetrician—was found to have problems was transferred immediately to a major centre. The interesting thing was that if things went wrong at the major centre, it did not claim the patient as its own, but referred to her as a patient of the smaller unit. The statistics would then show that the smaller unit did not do so well. I was interested to read over the weekend about a doctor who went to hospital for maternity provision and advised all of us to stay away. Hospitals are not necessarily the safest places, as we discovered in considered maternity provision.

I wish to refer to the acute hospital rationalisation programme in Belfast, on which there have been three interesting reports. We are still awaiting a ministerial decision to press ahead with the major reorganisation of maternity provision for which obstetricians have been looking for years. Obstetricians want a new facility to deal with about 5,000 deliveries a year. Plans are afoot for that, but with the recommendation that it should go on the City hospital site, the cry has gone up that this facility must be provided on the acute hospital site at the Royal Belfast hospital for sick children, where the paediatricians are based. Even now, any child born and developing difficulties in the Royal Maternity hospital has to be put in an ambulance and transported to the main Royal Belfast building. It would take a further five or 10 minutes to take that child to the suggested facility on the City site.

I have a problem with that, because we may be sending a message that any child born outside Belfast is in great danger. What will a mother in North Antrim, South Down, Tyrone, Fermanagh or Armagh say to that? Furthermore, I believe that I am right in saying that none of the specialists lives in west Belfast, so they will be nearer to the City site if they are called out to attend a case out of hours. Unfortunately, medical politics plays a part and politicians get the blame. I would urge the Secretary of State and the Minister to make the decision quickly, as the indecision is causing problems.

Indecision can be seen at another level. We are now at the end of February and, in another month or so, we shall be entering a new financial year. Although we have been contracting for some time, some contracts for next year have still not been worked out. In addition, some contracts for this year have only just been worked out. In the process of health reforms, we need people to get busier and to get their contracts worked out. The indecision may be a result of the change in view at the Department of Health in Northern Ireland, which has had a wonderful reorganisation of its financial structure. Money should travel with the patient, but the Eastern health and social services board—which provides most of the speciality services for Northern Ireland—has found that it is grossly underfunded. It is now seeking to tackle that, but there is still not enough funding for the people. In that context, I would ask for an urgent re-examination of capitation funding and that dealings should be more transparent. I am sure that if that is true for Northern Ireland, it could well be true in other parts of the nation.

Fundholding has been mentioned. People have been encouraged to go down that road, but because the Department of Health and Social Services does not have enough finances in its budget even for the coming year, some of the finest practices in Belfast have been held back in seeking the right to be fundholders. Specious and doubtful reasons have been given, the main one being that it takes time to train people. The practices have all the modern equipment and have been known for controlling their drugs budgets. Eastern Multifund, which specialises in providing services for general practitioners who may not want to be fundholders but would join together in the multifund, was prepared to take several of the practitioners on and take them through the course. The real reason was that the money was not available to bring them in and so it has been put back for another year.

Finally, attention has been paid to waiting lists. There are various ways of fiddling figures, as anyone who works with statistics knows. We can read them in different ways. Whereas, in the past when someone was referred to a consultant he or she was put on a waiting list, now a GP is not even allowed to refer the patient so quickly to the consultant. There is a time lag before the patient is seen. It is tragic if that is so in cases where immediate surgery is required.

In the light of the figures available in the Library today, with all the emphasis on our care in Northern Ireland, why have we not tackled the waiting list problem properly? The figures for the total in-patient waiting list—including day cases and ordinary in-patients—comparing the four constituent nations of the kingdom in 1995 and 1996, show a 13 per cent. increase in the waiting lists in Northern Ireland and a 2 per cent. increase in England. There has been an increase of 75 per cent. in Northern Ireland in those waiting for one year. Admittedly, the figures were taken in September and it has been suggested that that might mask the growth in the waiting lists in England since then. The figures for England were low in March 1996, but have increased subsequently.

On the other hand, ordinary admissions show a decrease because of day surgery, but the decrease is given in total numbers. They show that the decrease in those waiting for more than one year is greater in England than in Northern Ireland. In the past year, the numbers have increased in Northern Ireland, while they have fallen in England. In September, 13 per cent. of those waiting in Northern Ireland had been waiting for more than one year compared with 2 per cent. in England. In September 1996, 13.8 out of every 1,000 people in Northern Ireland were waiting, while it was 13.7 in Wales, 10.8 in England and 8.9 in Scotland. I wonder why there is such a variation if it is a national health service. Is there any explanation which will give us some hope that the service will be equitable throughout the nation?

8.23 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): In effect, we are discussing a composite motion tonight, which is very old Labour, is it not? Until I saw the Order Paper today I was not aware that a number of other issues had been included. When the title of the debate was announced last week, I was surprised that the Opposition had chosen health yet

[Mr. David Porter]

again. A month or so ago they chose it and every few weeks they trot out the national health service, trying to perpetuate the strange myth that it is theirs alone, when it is a fact that for most years of its life it has been developed and tax funded by Conservative Governments.

Two or three weeks ago, the Liberals were at it too. I listened to almost the entire Liberal-induced debate while trying to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, and because I thought that they might have something exciting to say about health. I was disappointed on both counts. Then I thought that perhaps they had chosen health to differentiate themselves from Labour, to deny the accusation that they are in pact with one another. I listened for the difference—there was virtually none.

All that both main Opposition parties want to do is to criticise the Government, forget the successes of health care and give the impression that somehow a little more money spent their way would solve all the problems. Labour, in particular, seems to have a two-faced approach to health. One is the public, alarmist, soundbite, shroud-waving face, which slams the Government at every opportunity and for every failing in one of the largest organisations in the world. The other is the more private, allegedly honest, wishfully thinking that it will soon be in power face, which has to admit that many Conservative reforms work, are popular with many health care professionals and are effectively spending more public money to deliver an ever-improving public service, transforming the lives of ever more of our citizens. How else can we regard the Opposition's astonishing assertion that in government they would leave untouched all Conservative spending plans for two years? Bleat, bleat, bleat about spending, year after year, make no connection with tax and spend and then give such a vote of confidence in our spending plans that they will be unchanged for two years—what sort of credibility is that for them, the party of natural opposition? The Liberals are honest enough to say that they would tax more to spend more, but as the Liberals no longer count for much, that is not worth the breath that is used to speak it.

I shall focus on two local issues in my area to illustrate a number of the successes that we have enjoyed and the problems that we face. No one is saying that everything is perfect or finished. It is very much an evolving health service—with technology and public expectations, how can it be anything but?

I have not always been uncritical of some aspects of Government policy. In 1974, the Great Yarmouth and Waveney district achieved a long-held ambition to have its own health authority. Once the James Paget district general hospital was opened in 1982, the arrangement worked well, services increased and the consultant establishment flourished. Although there were, as there still are, specialist services from Norwich, the coastal area east of Norwich had an identity of its own and increasingly met the needs of the people.

In 1994, it was decided that the health authority served too small a community and people would be better served by a large authority. There was opposition on an unprecedented scale from doctors, health workers and all parts of the political world—all to no avail. Bureaucrats in London overrode the Government's policy of localised responses to localised needs. They advised the then Minister to thwart a local health service within the national health service. They laid down a model for local delivery that may have looked neat and tidy on a piece of paper in the Department of Health, but was not in the best interests of local people. That year, in protest, I did not support the Government's programme outlined in the Queen's Speech and my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) did not support the Government on any health issue.

The purchase of services for Great Yarmouth went to East Norfolk health authority and for the Waveney area to Suffolk health authority. We got 15 guarantees, which collectively assured the people that the Great Yarmouth and Waveney communities were considered as a whole and were interdependent for health care. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth and I have since concentrated on helping to make the new structure work, ever improving the quality and quantity of services to patients.

All that background is necessary to understand where we are today. Suffolk and East Norfolk health authorities have recently taken decisions that have vindicated all the arguments for keeping the previous health authorities for both areas, but which also came about in response to the charge laid upon them—to purchase the best, most efficient and effective health care within finite budgets. It is a charge that no one disputes—not even the Labour party nowadays.

The health authorities have ended the contracts with Anglian Harbours NHS trust—a first wave and at first a very successful trust—with effect from this coming August. It will be the first NHS trust to go out of business because it has lost all its contracts. Having voted in Parliament not to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, the Labour party has been caught out with its two faces nationally and locally. It is unable to support the decision publicly, using it lamely to criticise the Government, yet it does not say how it would do things differently, keep within budget or match our year on year real terms spending increase pledge.

When it came to decide on the transfer of services from the Anglian Harbours NHS trust, Suffolk Health consulted widely and set up a project group of local stakeholders before a full public meeting that lasted more than four hours. It finally plumped for a mixed provider arrangement, which, of course, does not please everyone. There is widespread agreement that the people of south Waveney have been listened to and their views addressed. The community hospitals at Southwold, Halesworth and Beccles are assured, in line with Government policy. Lowestoft hospital will be managed by the James Paget hospital, which is enthusiastic and has presented a viable plan to secure its future and development. However, learning disabilities have gone to Allington NHS trust, along with children's and community services.

The community health council feels that Lowestoft hospital will not be used to full advantage. Providers will be doubled up on some sites, while there will be a fragmentation of the delivery of some services. Because of criticism of Suffolk Health's handling of decisions, the CHC has asked for a meeting, through me, with my hon. Friend the Minister for Health. It is the local watchdog and it has barked on the issue to warn the community. In the meantime, it will meet Suffolk Health for reassurances about transfer issues. In a devolved NHS, that is surely the right way forward. I know that other trusts, health

authorities and interested parties have their eyes on this issue to learn the national lessons that have been applied locally in an evolving health service.

The health authorities have also reduced their purchasing from All Hallows hospital, across the border at Ditchingham in south-west Norfolk. The hospital is outside the NHS; it is run by nuns and the London hospital management trust. The dilemma for the health authorities and our caring community, which has rightly applauded the quality of care there, is that if there are empty beds in NHS hospitals at Lowestoft, Halesworth, Beccles and Southwold, how can money be spent on non-NHS beds even if they are cheaper and closer to one part of the community?

A compromise has been reached. Some funding will be transferred to All Hallows hospital to allow more time for local GPs to bring forward their ideas for developing the hospital in our primary care-led, GP-driven health service. Hard choices have been made and we expect, thanks to the Friends of All Hallows, £70,000 up front from Suffolk Health, and a larger than expected purchase from East Norfolk, that All Hallows hospital will continue for another year while GPs in Bungay and south Norfolk work up their exciting fundholding plans for the hospital.

From the Opposition, we hear not a great welcome for pushing forward a GP-driven NHS and the further development of a community hospital, but threats. The plan, and therefore the hospital, is under threat from the confusion at the heart of Labour's fundholding plans. Its bizarre threat to abolish fundholding and its hasty promise to keep it, both announced in the same 48-hour period before Christmas by the right hon. Member for Islington, South (Mr. Smith), speak volumes for Labour's two-faced policy approach. It promises all things to all people, tries not to upset anyone, funks the hard decisions, sheepishly adopts Conservative policies and then pretends that it cared all along. If it ever matches our year-on-year spending pledge, the circle of its hypocrisy will be complete.

Labour confirmed its GP commissioning policy in this debate. However, as I understand it, GP commissioning would not cross county boundaries. All Hallows hospital is doomed under Labour. Voters in Bungay need to know that. The Liberals oppose both NHS trusts and fundholders and will, as usual, happily support Labour.

Labour says that it will solve all problems by cutting bureaucracy and management. No one argues with that because it sounds good. The Opposition could have voted with us to cut some bureaucracy. In the James Paget hospital, which serves my constituency and Great Yarmouth, more than half the managers are doctors and consultants. When they are not managing, they have stethoscopes round their necks while they treat patients. Is not that the best sort of hospital management? Is that what Labour will sweep away, or has it not thought that through either?

In our debates and in the press conferences, articles and policy papers that Labour churns out on health, it has not only failed to demolish the Government on health but failed to show any original thinking. If the NHS is in such poor shape, the cash shortages as acute as ever and the crisis all that it is cracked up to be, where are the distinctive, credible, sparkling answers? There is none. Labour's alternative is a policy silence. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State called it a vacuum. Have we won the argument on health care so resoundingly? It seems that we have. Labour and the Liberal Democrats, and their henchmen in the constituencies, in their own name or in those of bogus campaign and action groups, have played negative politics by issuing dire warnings, alarming pensioners and painting every change as privatisation. In my area, their bogus health campaign group has duped the local pensioners' organisation into becoming political.

Such alarm has struck a chord with people who understandably feel panic for themselves and their families. Hysteria about funding shortfalls and the supposedly sinister agenda of the Conservative party, which fostered and developed the NHS, cover up Labour's two-faced policy approach. Labour virtually admits that the NHS will be run in essentially the same way. It has promised to glean about £100 million from administrative savings. Fine, but Labour should be the first to point out that that is a drop in the ocean of the £42 billion or more a year that we spend on health. It hardly amounts to a credible health policy.

Labour accepts the separation of purchasing from providing as a philosophy. Presumably the Liberals accept it too, because they have called for three-year contracts. Labour's policy is all about crying wolf while catching up with us on health thinking. On present form, and it has had at least five shadow spokesmen since the last general election, Labour will not catch up till the general election after next, never mind the coming one.

In the meantime, we will go on delivering real increases for a locally run NHS, harnessing the benefits of new technology and new health care for every age group. I hope that we will continue to ask and answer difficult questions: what treatments work; which health professionals can do best which job; what measurements beyond bed numbers are more indicative of treatment; how can we further improve the quality of life? It is only the Conservatives who can ask those questions and get the economy right to pay for the answers. Only we are the party of the health service.

8.36 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I follow the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) in apologising to the House for not being present during the opening speeches. I was stuck with a difficult constituency problem.

My family has much for which to be grateful from the success of the national health service. My daughter was found to be suffering from a congenital hip dislocation and endured a long period of traumatic surgery and recuperation. She had surgery in the famous Myrtle Street children's hospital in Liverpool, followed by recuperation in a hospital in Heswall that is now closed. She has had a tremendously successful full recovery. I balance that against the extraordinary recent developments in human genetics. Conditions such as that, for which there seems to be a genetic propensity, could be resolved in the longer term if we are prepared to invest sufficiently in research and development. That is a huge task for the health service, the Medical Research Council and the private sector. We shall have to revisit the matter in detail.

I want to deal with issues in the north-west, especially those that affect the health authorities that service my constituency, Chester and the Wirral. The Government

[Mr. Andrew Miller]

should be warned. Those health authorities also service Wirral, South, where events this week may well prove embarrassing for the Conservative party.

The hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) questioned the integrity of some of our data. I notice from "Dod's Parliamentary Companion" that he studied at the New College of Speech and Drama—obviously the dramatic element had the most impact.

The Conservative party should be warned that the state of the health service is a serious issue. The Labour party has not just picked the relevant figures out of the air; the state of the health service has become a key issue in the by-election. The *Daily Post* of Liverpool, hardly an organ of the Labour party, ran the following sub-heading on 22 February:

"Daily Post readers put health at the top of their list of concerns as waiting lists grow and staff morale sinks".

The headline referred to

"The chronic NHS figures which could tip the political balance in Wirral South".

Those figures are not from the Labour party, but were collected in a survey undertaken by that newspaper.

That newspaper is right, as is the Labour party candidate, Ben Chapman, to expose the deficiencies in the local health service. I have campaigned with our candidate, and we met an elderly lady on her doorstep who told us of the difficulties that she was facing because the ambulance service could not provide adequate transport to take her for necessary orthopaedic treatment.

I should like the House to consider the problems faced by the Countess of Chester hospital and South Cheshire health authority. I have studied their documents and it is clear that they are in crisis. I invite the Minister to call upon that hospital and the health authority to publish what they have described as their recovery plan. If it is necessary to produce such a plan, there must, by definition, be a problem. The authority has published such a plan in an internal report, which should now be made available to the public. I call on the Minister to ensure that that happens. The report apparently sets out a series of cuts that must be made to services that are otherwise regarded as essential.

It appears that the hospital has a serious funding problem. From the report that has been presented to colleagues in the north-west, it appears that that problem is so serious that the hospital has had to consider how it can pay its staff and suppliers. One must deal seriously with a hospital trust in such severe crisis.

The lack of staff at the hospital has caused problems in the accident and emergency department and has also caused the temporary closure of certain wards. South Cheshire health authority is insisting that the Countess of Chester hospital must cut £500,000 from its staff budget. I am recounting not scare stories, but facts. That is why people in Chester, in my constituency and throughout the Wirral are expressing grave concern about the state of the health service.

Many of my constituents attend hospitals in the Wirral, for example, Arrowe Park, which is in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), and Clatterbridge, which is in the Wirral, South constituency. Both those hospitals have caused serious problems for my constituents, which are connected not simply with basic health provision but with the infrastructure that is necessary to make the health service work. A simple example—which is outside the terms of the debate, so I shall not dwell on it—is that my constituents have great difficulty getting to or from the hospitals, either as day-patients or as visitors, simply because the bus service provided since deregulation makes it almost impossible to travel to them. Patients are now having to follow extremely convoluted public transport routes to meet their health needs.

The biggest issues that have emerged from the debate are undoubtedly waiting lists and bed blocking. Before Conservative Members argue that bed blocking is simply a problem caused by Wirral council, and therefore one that they can blame on the Labour party, I remind them that I represent a constituency in Cheshire, which suffers from similar problems. That authority is controlled by the Conservative party.

Cheshire suffers acutely from long waiting lists and bed blocking. Those problems are especially severe when it comes to orthopaedic surgery, especially hip replacement, because of the elderly population profile. A friend of mine, Mr. Frank McCoy, has been waiting a considerable time for a hip replacement. I believe that the pain and worry that are caused are entirely unnecessary because it should be possible for a well-managed authority to offer proper guidance to patients on how long they may have to wait. That authority should ensure that the waiting time is reasonable.

The Opposition spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), referred to one case that I have also come across, of an elderly person who was told that she would have to wait 154 weeks for an orthopaedic consultation. That is an extraordinary delay. I found it so hard to believe that I searched out the relevant letter, and I can assure the House that it referred to that suggested waiting time. No explanation was offered. That delay reveals the extent of the crisis that we face.

To answer the hon. Member for Waveney, it is because of that crisis that the Labour party has pledged to use the first £100 million saved from cutting NHS red tape on targeting people on the waiting lists. That is an important commitment. I do not know about the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Belfast, South, who expressed concern about apparent regional discrepancies. It seems from the debate that the experience of some Conservative Members is entirely different from that of Members representing the north-west of England and Northern Ireland.

Waiting lists are an acute problem that has been exacerbated by the way in which health authorities and social services departments have failed to get to grips with the discharge process. A consistent bed blocking problem exists, and in the Wirral and Cheshire, it is seen simply as a case of overcrowding.

A number of issues must be examined. One that has not been touched upon in detail tonight, but which impinges upon the Wirral and the NHS in west Cheshire, is the provision of community care. A current proposal out for consultation calls for the merger of Wirral Community Healthcare trust and the West Cheshire NHS trust. I was particularly interested to learn from that consultative document, which reached me eventually, that

it pre-empted what appears to be the perfect managerial solution. It did not adequately address the needs of people in the community. For example, at the outset nobody had addressed the question whether Halton community trust should be drawn into the equation.

The Government seem to accept the principle that GPs should have a lead role in the discussions, and GPs have argued that the debate should be widened. Ellesmere Port hospital provides important recovery services for patients who have had major surgery and suffered strokes in other areas; we must ensure that those patients continue to have a service in future. We do not want a service that is affected by the magnetic pull of either the city of Chester or Birkenhead, leaving those of us in the middle of the Wirral seriously disadvantaged. I am waiting to hear from the Government on that. The results of the application were due to be made public in February, but I understand that they have been delayed. I recognise that there could be potential sensible savings in administrative overheads in bringing the trusts together, but the move must be driven by patient need, not by bureaucratic needs.

There are clear problems with waiting lists; there are clear problems with fewer nurses and more bureaucrats. Since the Government introduced the internal market into the NHS, the north-west has lost more than 4,400 nurses and gained more than 2,500 bureaucrats. It does not matter how one dresses up the definitions of the job functions: those figures stand up to examination. One has only to visit some of the hospitals in and around my area to see that. An extra £284,000 a day has gone into bureaucracy in the north-west; that would pay for about 300 more patients to be treated every day.

There are problems with accident and emergency provision. I referred to the Countess of Chester hospital, which is suffering from cuts in that service. There have also been difficulties because the next accident and emergency provision is at Arrowe Park hospital. That means that some people have to drive past one major hospital to get to the accident and emergency department. I appreciate—and everyone should recognise—the importance of Clatterbridge hospital in terms of its oncology service, which is world renowned. But one should not simply say that we should therefore concentrate another important service—in this case, accident and emergency—miles away, so that people have further to travel.

I am also concerned that the Government appear to be hiding the facts. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) referred to the BBC's "Close Up North" programme, which showed that accident and emergency provision in the north-west was in danger of collapsing. That was not a journalist's view, but a view expressed in a report that the Government had in their hands. Why was that report not published? Unless such information—which is in the Government's hands—enters the public domain, we cannot have a rational debate on the needs of the service. That is not the only report that is being held back from the public. I referred earlier to the debate that is taking place between my health authority and the Countess of Chester hospital about severe cuts at that hospital. Those cuts are affecting people across my community.

I also have serious concerns about intensive care provision. There are proposals to cut 27 beds at St. Catherine's hospital in Tranmere, which will have knock-on effects at the acute trust and the Wirral which, in turn, will have knock-on effects at the trust that covers the Countess of Chester hospital. Serious problems are beginning to emerge in that community as a result of the cuts.

I have referred to orthopaedic services, and we have heard about the case of one elderly lady. Problems are exacerbated when people simply do not get consultant appointments—my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury gave one such example.

Finally, there has been a series of fiddled figures, which have been most clearly revealed in the context of the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen hospital, which was officially declared to have only 329 patients even though there are 570 waiting at present.

Today's debate justifies the motion tabled by the Labour party. Some major reforms are needed; if they are not implemented, the Government will have their come-uppance. I have no doubt that the Government will get their come-uppance in Wirral, South on Thursday—they should look at what is happening there, as the figures that I gave are not mine.

Mr. Burt: The hon. Gentleman is interested only in the by-election.

Mr. Miller: The Minister said that I am not interested in the health service, but only in the by-election. He should look at the record of patient care that I have described.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a health service debate.

Mr. Miller: I have spoken on matters relating to prescription charges and the health service on a number of occasions in the House. The Minister has forgotten that my constituency abuts Wirral, South—we share health services, so issues affecting that constituency affect my constituents. It will become increasingly clear on Thursday that the people of Wirral, South agree with me. If the Government do not start to address the problems in that area, they will see the result in the general election as well.

8.57 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I need no lectures from the Labour party on health care. One of the things I find enormously depressing is the constant running down of the health service. I am enormously proud of the health service, and I am very proud of the stewardship that my Government have given it over a long period. The motion consists of 21 lines of carping criticism, out to destroy the power and strength of the health service. The motion is thin on content and long on rhetoric.

I am sorry that we have heard nearly five hours of negative debate from the Labour party. The language has been emotive. It was led off by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), using words like "serious crisis", "cuts" and "commercialising", jeering at the private finance initiative and focusing on what he called the "continuing deterioration" of the health service and "alarm" at the "highest ever figures" of people waiting for treatment.

[Lady Olga Maitland]

It is curious for a party that says it believes in the health service to bash that health service and bash patients' confidence in it. I feel keenly that the Labour party is frightening patients, which is irresponsible. It is irresponsible to play politics with vulnerable and distressed people; indeed, it is a disgrace. Patients have become victims of Labour's political football game, and it is curious that that football game intensifies whenever there is a by-election, as there will be this week, or as we approach a general election, as happened in 1992.

How many Labour Members somehow happened to mention the Wirral in their speech? Their speeches came across as soundbites, and the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) was no exception on that score.

The criticism is affecting people. I find that they are becoming worried and fearful that they will not get their treatment. I ask them why they feel like that, and they say that they do not know. I ask them whether they have had a difficult time or unsatisfactory service from their local doctor or their local hospital, but they say, "No; it was wonderful. My doctor is dedicated, the service I had at the hospital was magnificent, I came home in good time and I am fit and well." I ask, "So why do you feel so anxious?" They reply, "It is what they say the whole time"—"they" being the Labour party, constantly repeating worrying talk about the health service. I believe that Labour Members are proceeding in the hope that, if they mention the word "crisis" often enough, people will believe it.

Interestingly, on Labour's plans for the future, I note that no positive action was mentioned in the debate five weeks ago on the health service and no positive action has been mentioned in today's debate, initiated by the Labour party. Certainly there has been no pledge of an input of investment to match our investment. It would be fair to say that members of the Labour party have become the Scrooges of the health service. There are no promises of new money. They talk big but offer nothing. It reminds me of a well-known phrase from a Shakespeare play; they are

"full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing."

When Labour was last in power, it cut capital spending on the health service by 28 per cent. That is not a record to be proud of. We should also recall how the country was brought to its knees by the health unions—specifically, the National Union of Public Employees. When I was reading through the *Hansard* of the previous debate, I noted that one of the most moving interventions was made by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), reminding the Labour party of the distressing time he went through when his father was dying in hospital from cancer. His father desperately needed soup as nourishment, but the trade union officials—the NUPE officials—who were controlling the access of care were saying that he could not have soup, which was easy to swallow, but would have to survive on boiled eggs, which he could not swallow.

That haunted me because it was real. My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak spoke passionately. It was an experience that he had had, not just an anecdote. I fear that if, God forbid, we ever have a Labour Government, we could go down that road again. They would find their own health unions dictating the terms on which the service was to be run.

The Labour party claims to be greatly concerned about the nurses but seems to forget that, when it was in power, nurses' pay fell by 3 per cent. in real terms. When it comes to future investment in the NHS, of course, Labour Members are truly embarrassed—but they cannot bring themselves to reveal the truth, which is that the health service is safe in the Conservatives' hands. The Opposition's rhetoric is nothing but empty bluster.

We have said that we will increase spending on the health service in real terms in each of the next five years, including an extra £1.6 billion for patient care in 1997-98. That comes on top of an average 3 per cent. real-terms growth in spending over the past 18 years. To put it in more easily understood terms, that means that £724 is spent on each man, woman and child every year. On average, one multi-million pound NHS capital project has been completed every week since 1979; and more than 750 multi-million pound schemes have been completed in the past 10 years. That is our success story; but will Labour match our record on patient care? In reply, we hear silence and see red faces.

It is worth recalling that the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) wrote in *The Times* on 16 January:

"Labour's health policy will not look credible at the general election if we do not commit ourselves to matching the rate of growth delivered by the Conservatives in recent years".

Political commentators have repeated the criticism. Perhaps Labour Members would like to hear an independent view; I therefore point them in the direction of remarks by Colin Brown, chief political correspondent of *The Independent*, writing on 28 November 1996:

"The big question Mr. Smith has to address is resources. It is no good Labour relying on its present formula of sacking managers to create £100 million for the NHS to recycle. The managers have gone; the savings have been made. He should fight Gordon Brown, the Shadow Chancellor, for the right, at the very least, to match the Tory cash promise for next year."

This £100 million—not even new money—is the only measly pledge that we hear from the Labour party. It is not worth the paper it is written on. To give him his due, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury is slightly more realistic than the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), his predecessor, who claimed—absurdly—last July that she would cut £1.5 billion from national health service administration costs. That amounts to 60 per cent. of the total of such costs.

What do the Opposition really mean by their attack on bureaucracy? They should come clean on how they intend to achieve it. Which managers will they sack? Do they mean to sack only junior clerks and typists? Will they include nursing managers or former matrons with hands-on experience in the wards? If Labour did sack the 3,000 senior NHS managers or some of the 8,000 other administrative staff, imagine the ensuing redundancy payments—they would cost millions. The so-called savings would disappear, and the clinicians, whom we are trying to free up to get on with their proper task of patient care, would be saddled with more administrative work. In any case, the Labour party has always been opposed to our reforms to reduce bureaucracy. I recall that Labour voted against the abolition of regional health authorities, whereby a whole tier of bureaucracy would disappear.

As usual, the Opposition paint a distorted picture. They say that the number of NHS managers has increased markedly since 1985. There are 6,430 senior managers in the NHS—in other words, for every senior manager, there are 77 people providing direct patient care—but the classification "senior manager" is a new term. Two thirds of the increase in manager numbers is accounted for by a reclassification of jobs. In many cases, they had been doctors or senior nurses.

Far from putting more money towards patient care, Labour's commitment to the social chapter and the minimum wage would increase our labour costs and divert money from patients. The abolition of compulsory competitive tendering so favoured by the Opposition would make health service costs soar.

Let us examine Labour's pledge to reduce waiting lists by 100,000, by releasing the £100 million from NHS bureaucracy—another worthless pledge. The NHS waiting list is not a static figure. As people are treated, so more join. The NHS carried out 10.5 million treatments in 1994-95. Waiting times have been reduced dramatically. As has already been pointed out by my colleagues, half of all patients are seen immediately. Half the remainder are seen within five weeks, almost 75 per cent. are seen within three months and 98 per cent. are seen within a year. Nevertheless, the overall waiting list remains virtually static, as more people keep coming forward to take advantage of the new medical procedures and treatments available.

The figure of £100 million is at best a mirage—it could never be realised. Labour claimed in "A Pledge to Patients" published in July last year that all health authorities and trusts would reduce management costs by 3.8 per cent., which, it was claimed, would release £80 million for patient care.

That is a sweeping pledge, which ignores variations in cost—for example, the increased costs of running a teaching hospital. It is also arithmetically faulty; Labour's plan was costed on the basis of published management costs from 1995-96, but that is out of date. Time has moved on. In 1996-97, health authorities and trusts have dramatically reduced their management costs. The chances of finding savings anywhere near £80 million are remote.

Time is short, but I wish to pay tribute to the magnificent health service in my constituency, Sutton. The attacks on the local health service cause great distress to patients locally. My fellow Members of Parliament in the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority were under a siege of protest because of the scaremongering stories pushed by the Labour party and the Liberals, suggesting that all our services would be cut, especially the services of my local hospital, St. Helier. It was claimed that operations would be delayed, treatments reduced, and so on.

It did not turn out like that. Instead, we read excellent news last week in the *Sutton Borough Guardian* under the headline "Casualty gets big boost." We found that not only would there be a boost to our annual increase, but £1.5 million was coming to St. Helier. Of that sum, £200,000 has been allocated to the accident and emergency department, which will double in size and receive eight more full-time nursing staff and an extra seven or more treatment bays or casualty beds. The A and E department does magnificent work, coping on average with 207 people a day, or almost nine people an hour. Morale is high and the staff are dedicated. I have watched them at work. That is just one example of new investment. There is also new investment in the renal unit. Waiting times have been cut and the number of patients increased in every department of the hospital.

I am proud of what we have achieved at St. Heliers. In the same way, the Royal Marsden hospital, which is world famous for treating cancer patients, is not only making a success of treating more patients but successfully sending them home to lead useful lives.

I appreciate that time is tight; I regret that I cannot continue with the remarks that I should have liked to make, because I am extremely concerned about the bashing of GP fundholding practices. I wish to make just one further comment: if the Opposition decide to abolish fundholding practices as has been suggested, they will destroy patient care. They will add an extra tier of bureaucracy by introducing collective commissioning programmes; the people who sit on those bodies, whether they are health unions or local politicians, will have a vested interest in feathering their own nests, but that will not benefit patients.

As we approach a general election, the country at large must make crucial decisions about its future health service. There is no doubt that a health service in the hands of the Labour party will be no health service at all, whereas we have an excellent track record in which everyone can feel confident. The people have seen what we have done for patients and know what we shall continue to do.

9.15 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): In closing this debate as far as Back Benchers are concerned, I should like to spend a minute or two binding together all the different issues in the motion. Any anecdote about the health service would be encompassed by the motion, but it is important to look at some of the principles that lie behind our criticisms of how it has operated under the Government. We are mounting what I regard as a principled critique of the health service, and it is important to place a few matters on record.

One factor that links the different parts of the motion is that we criticise the Government for showing a preoccupation with private provision. I shall give some examples. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) referred to the commercialisation of the GP service. He was right to refer to the amendments tabled by the Minister for Health, which are to be found on pages 431-34 of today's Order Paper.

It is clear that the Minister has been at great pains to assure the British Medical Association that the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill is not intended to pave the way for the commercialisation of GP services. It is obvious from comments in *The Independent* that the Minister's main concern is to ensure that this does not become an election issue. He has therefore two-timed the Committee that is considering the Bill. It is important that the Committee should discuss the Bill, but it is even more important to meet the BMA committee to sort out the minimum that it will settle for in order not to use its surgeries to campaign against the Tory party and the Government's record. That is why the Minister has tabled a sheet of amendments to the Bill.

[Mr. John Gunnell]

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury was generous in saying that the Government had made mistakes and had got the matter wrong in the first place. They did not make mistakes; nor did they make mistakes the second time, when they again got it wrong in the eyes of the BMA—they were simply trying to get away with as much as possible in preparing for privatisation.

The second issue is the private finance initiative. I have no objection to the PFI per se. I agree with my party, which is about to support it. I have plenty of experience of working with private companies. The difficulty is that it is not possible to get any capital development without a PFI scheme.

A written answer that I received on Thursday from the Secretary of State listed 35 PFI schemes, of which 21 did not have a signed contract. I quite understand that businesses in the private sector do not want to sign contracts unless they are satisfied that they will return a profit—if they do not make a profit, they cannot expect to stay in existence for long; they have to make a profit. What is happening is that the NHS capital spend is determined by the rate at which the private sector signs up to schemes. That is taking the involvement of the private sector too far. There have to be some NHS-funded capital schemes.

Thirdly, and most important, is the issue of community care. I am very concerned at the plans for the privatisation of social services and community care. The Secretary of State, in his discussions with the Association of Directors of Social Services, made it clear that he sees social services not as a provider but as a purchaser of services. There are elements of the community care programme in which social services have to give 85 per cent. of the work to the private sector. The involvement of the private sector and the fact that the Government are trying at every level to push private provision is a matter of considerable concern that affects the future and quality of the service.

Many good things are happening in the NHS—I do not dispute that—but there is a gradual withdrawal by the Government from the fundamental principles on which the NHS was based. The NHS was founded on equity. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury gave the telephone patter that was to be given by Leeds general infirmary staff. The Secretary of State dismissed it as an anecdote. It was not. Throughout the country, trusts are finding that they cannot carry out operations at the moment because health authorities are out of money and they therefore have to concentrate on fundholders. That is a way of skewing the waiting list. It makes it longer. It also keeps some people off the waiting list for a few months, so they spend less time on it. There is a fundamental inequity of provision.

The NHS was intended to be free at the point of delivery, but increasingly we see charges. The service that is provided is on the basis of need, or should be, but it is very clear that that is not the only principle involved in the delivery of care.

A study carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said:

"Both health care and social care should be free at the point of delivery for all older people."

It also said:

"A complex funding system has shunted the costs of care from services which were free at the point of delivery to more means-tested provision."

The Government have not only increased the amount of private provision but moved away from the fundamental principles on which the NHS was based.

9.23 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The comprehensive nature of our debate has confirmed the wisdom of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) in presenting a motion dealing with health, community care and disability. Time after time we have been shown tonight that those issues relate to each other.

The debate was enhanced by the speeches of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and my hon. Friends the Members for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett), for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy), for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller)—who will soon have a new Labour neighbour—and for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell).

The debate has shown that, on disability policy, the British agenda has always been led by Labour. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has not stayed to hear my speech, but perhaps he will read it tomorrow. Just as a Labour Government gave birth to the national health service, so a Labour Administration under Harold Wilson led the world on disability policy. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe was the world's first disability Minister. He was a Labour Minister, and we are as proud of him tonight as we were throughout his years in government. He knew that, in the decade that began in 1970, we were setting an agenda of health, services and benefits for disabled people. His Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 was in its way revolutionary and must be revisited.

We moved on and, in the mid-1980s my Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 excited the House. It was certainly fine that we managed to get the Bill through. I hope to return to that later in my speech. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the disability policy agenda moved further forward, and now we must move to tackle not just disadvantage, but discrimination.

That is Labour and, in fairness, other Opposition parties—but not the Conservatives—who have reflected the demand of disabled people for comprehensive and enforceable civil rights. A succession of Bills was presented by my right hon. and hon. Friends, and on a succession of Fridays hon. Members of all parties and all parts of Great Britain and Northern Ireland voted on them. We must also acknowledge that some Tory Back Benchers also supported our proposed legislation. So impressed were they that three of them crossed the Floor.

Civil rights for disabled people are not matters of dry legal entitlement or some formal claim to equal treatment. Disabled people are not just the stuff of political lobbying or pleading special interest: their rights constitute the vital, legitimate interests of more than 6 million of our fellow citizens. They relate to the blind boy who was about to leave school and who told me about being rejected at a job interview the moment the personnel manager saw his white stick although he could have done the job just as well as anybody else. They also relate to the woman who was refused admission to a cinema because she was in a wheelchair and the one space for a wheelchair in the cinema had been set aside for somebody else.

The debate is about the disabled citizens and voters, identified by Scope in its survey of the last general election, who were forced to vote in the streets because no one had thought to make polling stations accessible. In our nation, a disabled person is three times more likely to be unemployed, and six times more likely to be turned down for a job, than anyone else. The average income of disabled workers is just 80 per cent. of the national average income. If ever there was a case for the minimum wage that is it, and I proudly proclaim it.

The case involving ICI, which was brought to our attention by my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), was a blatant example of disabled people being exploited, but we heard nothing from Conservative Members about it. In our nation, only one teacher in a thousand is disabled. That has many implications when we suggest that schools ought to be part of our community in every sense. There are only 80,000 accessible homes in Britain, but 4.25 million of our citizens have mobility-related impairments.

The Parliament began with the Government giving the impression that discrimination against disabled people did not exist. What we have witnessed since then does the Conservative party no credit either in the House or outside. The Berry Bill, as it was called, was piloted by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and was backed by a majority of hon. Members. The Government initially claimed that it would cost £17 billion—a ridiculous figure which they have never used again. We saw the disgraceful spectacle of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) and the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) talking out the Bill. The right hon. Member for Chelsea at least had the decency to apologise to the House.

It is no wonder that disabled people are cynical and sceptical about politicians when they are faced with the tawdry and dirty tactics of Conservative Members. It is no wonder that the recent MIND survey "Not Just Sticks and Stones" shows that the number of disabled people who blame politicians for the discrimination that they face is larger than the number who blame anyone else, including the people whom they encounter day by day. The Government talked out the Bill against the wishes of all Opposition parties.

The right hon. Member for Chelsea was made a scapegoat, and was relieved of ministerial office. He was replaced by the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), who made an art form of wringing his hands with concern while washing them of responsibility. At least he was allowed to introduce legislation, which the right hon. Member for Chelsea was never permitted to do in six years in office. That was disgraceful. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 came as a fig leaf to cover the Government's earlier embarrassment. It was a missed opportunity.

The Government were so terrified that a civil rights Act would eventually be passed that we were offered their tepid Bill, which was a fine example of legislation inspired by panic, not policy. Their White Paper failed even to mention education or transport. The Bill included rail stations and bus termini, but ignored trains and buses. It took a debate and a reasoned amendment on Second Reading for the Government to realise that they had forgotten to include provision for Northern Ireland.

The Act abolished the 3 per cent. employment quota and proclaimed to introduce in its place the right to equal treatment at work, but it excluded from that right disabled people working for smaller companies, which account for 94 per cent. of British firms. What a disgrace. The Government claimed that they wanted to outlaw discrimination, that the Act was sincere and well thought out, and that it was rooted in a genuine commitment to the 6.5 million disabled people who demanded full and comprehensive civil rights. However much the Tories patronise disabled people, their measures show that they view them as an irritation, and none of their legislation will be remembered.

In their amendment to the motion, the Government have the effrontery to compare themselves with other European Union nations. Have they considered the implications of their claims? Their amendment does not mention article 3 of the German constitution, which outlaws discrimination. It says:

"Nobody shall be discriminated against because of a disability."

Their amendment does not mention the Danish equal opportunities centre for disabled persons, which was established in 1993 as a watchdog for disabled people, and can bring discrimination cases before the Danish authorities.

I am surprised that the Government's amendment does not mention the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, established by the Government in Ireland, which, following extensive consultation, including more than 6,000 submissions, among other proposals, has recommended a fully fledged civil rights disability Act. The Irish Government expect to legislate this year.

Let us consider the Government's policy on mental health, community care and direct payments. Last year, I led for Labour on the Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill. Once again the Conservative Government were introducing a measure in response to demands from disabled people. Having accepted the principle that disabled people should be enabled to organise and pay for their own services by receiving direct payments, Ministers could not overcome their Conservative inclination to limit those new freedoms to as few people as possible. That is why at first they tried to exclude people with learning disabilities as if those service users were incapable of making an informed judgment about their own needs, no matter how well advised they were. The Government backed down on that, but as with civil rights and disability discrimination, they did so only because the parliamentary arithmetic forced their hand.

Above all, the Government refused to allow disabled people over 65 even to apply for direct payments, adding further to the disadvantage faced by older people. Even after the Government lost in Committee not once, but twice, on that issue, they insisted on excluding older disabled people from direct payments for the first 12 months. What utter meanness. They repeatedly rejected our arguments for creating a level playing field as between recipients of direct payments from local councils and recipients of independent living payments from the Department of Social Security, even though many people receive both.

The Government failed to take the opportunity to provide for registration of domiciliary care providers to meet the concern of disabled and elderly people about

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

establishing a common national standard for carers who work in people's homes. Disabled and elderly people are entitled to protection from society.

The Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996 was just one example of Tory mismanagement of community care, the Government's lack of commitment and understanding of measures that they have been forced into, and their failure to see them through.

The Government's mental health policy has been a complete failure. We all know of cases in our constituencies. Time and again we are faced with the evidence of a system that is failing. It cannot be right that nearly one third of NHS beds for people with mental health problems have been cut since 1989, yet we still await the appropriate community facilities. It cannot be right that for many people the first time their mental disability is recognised is when they are assessed by a prison medical unit. It cannot be right that only one in five people diagnosed as having schizophrenia and living in the community have access to a community psychiatric nurse. The Audit Commission concluded:

"Good comprehensive community care for people with mental health problems is slow to develop and its lack of implementation is causing major concern."

I trust that that is reflected in our considerations tonight.

The Government's community care policy has provided inadequate care for those in need and inadequate protection for the general public. I am happy to congratulate the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey). Her expertise and commitment are well known.

A new Labour Government will be committed to raising standards and ending the lottery in community care so that people have access to care regardless of where they live. As we have made clear many times, we shall establish a royal commission to work out a fair system for funding long-term care for elderly and disabled people. Nothing less will do. The cares identified by Sir Roy Griffiths have become greater still and invite support for that recommendation.

Mencap is particularly concerned about the treatment that people with learning disabilities receive in hospital. The recent community health report, "Hungry in Hospital" revealed that some people with learning disabilities were not eating while in hospital, as catering contractors were merely placing food in front of them without recognising their need for help. The report said that the uneaten food is cleared away at the end of the meal time, and that there is no follow-up action to establish why the food is not being eaten.

There is a great deal of anecdotal evidence, of which I am sure right hon. and hon. Members must be aware, of people with learning disabilities getting wrong or inappropriate treatment in hospital. In another case—*[Interruption.]* I do not see this as a source of amusement. In another case highlighted for me by Mencap, a young woman was sent home with an untreated broken leg because she could not explain the pain that she was in and the medical staff were not sufficiently trained to help her communicate effectively.

People with learning disabilities are often denied the full range of dental care.

"People like this do not take care of their teeth",

one mother was told. Her disabled son had his teeth extracted when a filling would have been sufficient. Such things are a disgrace to modern Britain and must be put right, but a new Labour Government will set our sights even higher and take our agenda one step further. We will demonstrate our commitment to health and social services, in contrast with the past miserable 18 years of Tory neglect.

I welcome the chance to look again at my Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, remembering that, after much huffing and puffing, the Government finally backed down and the Bill became law. Half that Act is still to be implemented, which is absolutely shameful and, above all, a shameful disregard for legislation passed by the House. The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 provides only the right to assessment, and fails to ensure service provision. Our commitment to the agenda of health and social services is without question—and the people know it, as every opinion poll shows, and as I am sure we will see again on Thursday.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was an opportunity missed. That is why a Labour Government will act quickly. We will create a disability rights commission in place of the two separate bodies that advise Ministers: the National Advisory Council on Employment of People with Disabilities and the National Disability Council. The commission will advise Ministers on a range of issues affecting disabled people. It will be encouraged to be proactive and not just a talking shop. It will work on what changes to the law are necessary and how we can best deliver full civil rights to all Britain's 6.5 million disabled people.

We will act on the commission and further initiatives in consultation with interested parties because we believe that employers, service providers and disabled people themselves should be fully involved in setting out the route that we should follow. In Northern Ireland, we will follow the same principles. I was delighted to visit the constituency of the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) just a few weeks ago, and I welcome, too, his speech.

Labour in power will want to go very much further than any Government have ever gone. We believe in a dialogue, but not of the deaf such as we have witnessed under this Government, who claimed to consult but ignored the results of consultation. We will want to move the agenda forward once again, as we did by introducing the NHS, bringing it up to date to meet needs. Just as we will build on the agenda of health and social services begun by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe so we will deliver our commitment to civil rights. Just as we will build on that agenda, we will move to a new agenda for disabled people, of skills, knowledge and opportunity—an agenda for the new century which affirms that we have pursued for and with disabled people better social services, health care, social security benefits, independent living and civil rights. We will do that to enable disabled people to make the most of their talents and abilities. *[Interruption.]* It appals me that Ministers are mocking the rights of disabled people. In time, the people of this country will give their response.

We shall ensure that disabled people have access to the education, training and employment opportunities that should belong to us all. We commit ourselves to that progress. In five and 10 years' time people will be able to judge our objectives by the results. All I ask tonight is that we judge the present Government on their record, ignoble though it is.

9.45 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): Having heard the contributions from the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and from the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), we all know why the motion is so long: they had precious little to say and no policy to convey.

We had an interesting debate until we got to the huff and puff of the past 15 minutes. In contrast with the hon. Member for Monklands, West I want to deal briefly with some of the points that we have heard.

There has been an overwhelming contrast between the two sides this evening. My hon. Friends achieved a sense of balance: they do not underestimate the problems of the health service and our ability to overcome those problems and deliver a good service. In contrast, Opposition Members hardly mentioned the good work done by so many people in the health service. *[Interruption.]* No, it is true. There was a constant attempt to draw attention to all the problems rather than to anything else.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) began with a recognition of the excellence of the staff and the work that they do. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), to whom we all enjoy listening, made an interesting contribution. He directed the arrow straight at the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, who pointedly refused to take his intervention, which would clearly have been about committing money to the national health service, by skilfully turning his back throughout. No wonder the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey described Labour's motion as desperately, sadly politically wanting. What an indictment. For once the hon. Gentleman was absolutely right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), in an excellent contribution, went to the heart of some of the issues that the Government have to face about how to reconcile new techniques, new technologies and advances in medicine with the everyday experiences of people who often want the status quo to remain. When there are difficult decisions to take about how to improve services—sometimes by closing down one facility in order to develop another—difficulties can arise.

My hon. Friend faced that problem by describing the situation in Barnet. He gave us a clue about how to face those difficult challenges, in contrast to the contributions from Opposition Members, who seem to take the line that we should save everything and preserve everything. However, when a new facility opens in their area, they go around smiling for the photographers and take some of the credit.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy), in her, as usual, interesting contribution, spoke about some of the problems in Liverpool, especially those concerning the hospitals trust. No Conservative Member would condone in any way any massaging of the figures. The hon. Lady will be aware that some of the allegations made about the figures have been disputed by the trust, and an investigation is being conducted.

There was an interesting exchange in two sequential speeches by the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett) and my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North–East (Mr. Congdon). They both mentioned GP fundholding, which was a theme of the debate. The hon. Gentleman described the situation in his constituency where nearly all the doctors are GP fundholders. They are now doing minor operations and expanding their surgeries. The hon. Gentleman seemed to suggest that that was not good news, because of the impact on the local hospitals. As my hon. Friend asked, why do GPs want to provide such services and why do their patients want them? How do hospitals respond when GPs do that work? I would have thought that we all want to expand facilities to allow our constituents to be treated closer to home. If surgeries can provide such services, that is good. As my hon. Friend pointed out, there is no reason for any GP to feel excluded by the system of fundholding, because all GPs can join in.

The acid test is whether one wants to improve services to the level provided by the best or—as the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury suggested Labour would—take away the good to provide poorer services for everyone. There is an interesting contrast between our two approaches.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) gave us a welcome reminder of the importance of private medicine in the mix of care. He spoke as someone who is an NHS patient, as is his wife. His speech was devoid of cant and he talked about the importance of private health care in a mixed economy. He missed out only a reference to the growing number of workers who enjoy the benefits of private health insurance, either on their own initiative or through their unions. That gives the lie to the Opposition's claims, because trade unionists show by their actions what they think of the availability of mixed care. They have more sense about the future of health care than Opposition Members will ever have.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) raised two issues that I wish to address. He spoke about the acute hospitals reorganisation project in Belfast. The third report from the project steering group, which is led by Dr. James McKenna, contains proposals on 16 specialties, including maternity services. The steering group and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary with responsibility for health in Northern Ireland have consulted widely. My hon. Friend has met several delegations to hear their views, especially on the maternity services proposals. He is considering all the arguments, but his primary concern is to make decisions that will be in the best interests of all patients. I assure the hon. Gentleman that his comments have been noted. I have also noted his comments on waiting lists. I am sure that he will be glad to hear that an additional £2 million has been made available to the boards to help keep down waiting lists.

[Mr. Alistair Burt]

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) makes good contributions to health service debates, but he cannot reject my accusation that this debate has been timed with the by-election in mind. It was raised in several speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), in an excellent speech, pointed to the Opposition's failure to promise more finance.

The final part of the motion mentions the Government's record on disabled people. The description by the hon. Member for Monklands, West was a travesty. He knows that he and his party cannot hold a candle to the Government's record on disability matters, including increases in expenditure and improvements in opportunities for disabled people. That record deserves recognition. The hon. Gentleman rightly paid tribute to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) who was the first Minister for disabled people in the world, but several of my colleagues have also made significant contributions. I single out especially my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott), who made a distinctive contribution to the care of disabled people while he was a Minister.

A range of measures dealing with disability have been brought in by this Government, and our record is second to none. In employment, we have introduced the access to work scheme, which plays a substantial role in providing disabled people with the help that they need to obtain and retain jobs and promotion. The programme's budget has been increased to £19 million. The Employment Service last year helped place 87,500 disabled people in jobs and enabled another 6,000 people to retain their positions.

The major changes that the Government have made in the way in which social care is delivered have meant that disabled, elderly and vulnerable people in need of public support have been given greater choice and better support tailored to their individual needs. In lieu of telling us anything about his policy, the hon. Member for Monklands, West has promised a royal commission on community care. I am sure that that is the first known example of the Opposition seeking the long grass in the absence of any policy that they may have.

Our reforms have culminated in the first-rate work done on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, our most significant development and the flagship of our policy on disabled people. It is better than its would-be predecessors because the other Bills were flawed. The Act will make a distinctive contribution to the history of social legislation in the United Kingdom. Many events throughout the centuries have marked the beginning of a new era—the creation of the welfare state being one—and the Disability Discrimination Act will be one of those.

Until the introduction of the Act, disabled people were powerless in the face of discrimination, and the hon. Member for Monklands, West gave a number of examples of such discrimination. They have been discriminated against when applying for jobs, promotion and training, and they have been refused services in shops, restaurants and clubs. They have been powerless to do anything about that until now. Under the Disability Discrimination Act, employers can be held to account in industrial tribunals for unjustifiably discriminating against a person because of his or her disability. Service providers can be taken to court for unjustifiably discriminating against their disabled customers. The hon. Member for Belfast, South and others should not mistake the absence of a commission for a lack of determination to enforce the law as, through tribunals and the courts, it can and will be enforced. The flaw with a commission is that it has no budget, and the hon. Member for Monklands, West has retreated again this evening from a position that he previously held on this matter.

The key points of this evening's debate have become clear. The Labour party—having shed the convictions of its past—is now wholly negative about the national health service, and it has only a vacuum where its policy should be. On key criterion after key criterion in terms of the success of policies on health and disability, this Government score highly. Memories of Labour's past failures should encourage a respectful silence from that party.

On hospital building, it was the Labour party that reduced by some 28 per cent. capital expenditure on the health service, while we have increased it. It was under a Labour Government that nurses' pay fell. It was under a Labour Government that doctors' pay rose by only a small amount compared with what we have provided. Total spending on the NHS rose by 17 per cent. in real terms under Labour, but has risen by a massive 74 per cent. in real terms under this Government.

On disability, our expenditure for those most in need has quadrupled since 1978-79. On employment, 87,500 people have found jobs with the help of the Employment Service. On education—so important to disabled people and their families—50 per cent. of those designated as having special educational needs are now in the maintained sector.

On rights and opportunities for disabled people, we have put the Disability Discrimination Act on the statute book—a landmark piece of legislation throughout the European Community. The Act is balanced and responsible in recognising the hopes and aspirations of disabled people, while taking the responsibilities and obligations of the rest of society into account—particularly those who provide employment, goods and services.

Having retreated from their original hostility to the Act, the Opposition now know that it cannot be repealed. The hon. Member for Monklands, West simply offers a sop in the shape of a commission that does not have a budget.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burt: No. The cost of putting together the National Advisory Council on the Employment of People with Disabilities and the National Disability Council would not amount to bringing together one single, decent case. A commission could not do the job. The House, my right hon. and hon. Friends and the country as a whole will see in our handling of such sensitivities that only a Conservative Government can find the means and can afford to care for the vulnerable people in society. Our stewardship of the NHS and of those who are disabled and vulnerable gives the lie to everything that the hon. Member for Monklands, West has been saying. Our record, compared with the Opposition's, shows that there is only one side of the House to trust on this issue.

Mr. Chris Smith *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 281, Noes 311.

Division No. 81] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin–Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dixon, Rt Hon Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*

Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Sir Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael

Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 311, Noes 279.

Division No. 82] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Sir Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Riffkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*

Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dixon, Rt Hon Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'ld)*
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Macklnlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara

Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House is committed to the National Health Service as a public service, promoting health and providing high-quality care more quickly than ever before; expresses its support for the continuing development of primary care and community health services; welcomes the Government's commitment to a growing budget for the National Health Service throughout the next five years; supports the Government's policies to increase independence, choice and opportunities for people with disabilities; and welcomes the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as a landmark in legislation for disabled people, of which there is no equal in the European Union.

Orders of the Day

BIRDS (REGISTRATION CHARGES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 90(6) (Second Reading Committees), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

BIRDS (REGISTRATION CHARGES) BILL
[WAYS AND MEANS]

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Birds (Registration Charges) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment of any sums received by the Secretary of State into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an Association between the European Communities and their Member States and the State of Israel) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 10th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

Question agreed to.

DATA PROTECTION

Queen's recommendation signified—

Resolved,

That the Data Protection Registrar shall, with effect from 1st April 1996, be paid a salary of £60,153 per annum.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

ADMINISTRATION

Ordered,

That Mr. Ken Purchase be added to the Administration Committee.—*[Mr. Dunn, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Human Growth Hormone

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

10.30 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise my concerns about Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and human growth hormone treatment. Because of the clear connections, I hope that it will be in order to include some reference to concerns about the health aspects of new variant CJD.

My concerns are shared by many hon. Members on both sides of the House. A meeting was held last week to consider the matter on a cross-party basis. I am grateful for the attendance at the meeting last Tuesday of several hon. Members, some of whom are present tonight, including my hon. Friends the Members for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) and for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn).

I shall to set out briefly the background to this unfortunate affair. I imagine that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), will differ little with me on the historical facts. The human growth hormone programme began in 1959, after pilot studies undertaken on behalf of the clinical endocrinology committee of the Medical Research Council. In view of the results of those studies and developments in the United States, the CEC supported clinical trials of human growth hormone derived from pituitary glands as a treatment for growth hormone deficient children who would not otherwise have grown normally. The 17-year trials began under the direction of the MRC in 1959, and during that period it was responsible for all aspects of the work. When the trial was completed in 1979, the Department of Health and Social Security, as it then was, assumed responsibility and the trial ran for a further eight years.

By the end of 1976, a total of 642 children had been treated in the programme, which had demonstrated obvious success and became a standard treatment for failure to grow. From 1977 to May 1985, a further 1,243 children were treated, making a total of 1,885.

The programme was halted in 1985 after human growth hormone was withdrawn in the USA following the deaths of three recipients through CJD. It had been known since 1968 that CJD was transmissible, and contamination of human growth hormone by CJD was suspected. In April 1985, the first death from CJD in a recipient of human growth hormone in the United Kingdom—Alison Lay—was reported. The use of cadaveric human growth hormone was suspended in the UK during the following month, when 865 people were undergoing the treatment.

It is now clear that the human growth hormone was contaminated with CJD from some of the pituitary glands removed from almost 1 million human corpses used between 1959 and 1985. From projections of the incidence of CJD in the UK population, it has been suggested that as many as 200 pituitary glands from cadavers affected by CJD may have been used.

The Minister will be familiar with the detailed arguments presented last year in the High Court on behalf of the families of those affected, which concentrated on the known risk of CJD transmission and the methods of both the selection of cadaveric material and its extraction and purification. He will be aware that the judge concerned found that there had been negligence in the failure to act on clear warnings regarding the risk of contamination by CJD issued to the MRC in October 1976 and the failure subsequently to act on those warnings in the early months of 1977. He eventually ruled that negligence could be established in those cases where patients had started treatment after 1 July 1977.

The Minister is aware that that judgment excludes the cases of most of those who have died and of those who are still well but whose lives have been ruined by fear of developing CJD—the "worried well", as they have been termed. Their grievance is understandable in the light of that ruling because the human growth hormone was produced and administered entirely under the authority of the Minister's Department. Mortuary attendants collected and supplied pituitary glands, which were processed into cadaveric human growth hormone by Government servants. It was then prescribed by doctors working wholly within the national health service, who were unaware that the product had never been given a licence by the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

The Department of Health's processing committee, which oversaw preparation, became aware in 1976-77 of concerns that the product carried an unquantifiable risk of an untreatable fatal disease but failed to communicate that concern to the clinical committee that oversaw the treatment programme. Children treated after 1 July 1977 were treated on the false premise that they were receiving safe treatment with a product regarded by their doctors as having pharmaceutical quality. There is no dispute whatever that CJD among those patients treated with cadaveric growth hormone before 1985 had been caused by the infectious agent given during NHS treatment.

The Minister will recall that on 6 November I brought a delegation to his Department comprising the parents of three young people who died of CJD following human growth hormone treatment, and their legal representative, Mr. David Body. The parents included Alison Lay's mother who, on behalf of herself and others, expressed concern about the circumstances of the families of those victims whose treatment had commenced before 1 July 1977. In response to that point, the Minister advised me subsequently, in a letter dated 12 November 1996, that in relation to compensation it was not appropriate to go beyond the terms of the court judgment.

Exactly a week ago, the House debated the BSE crises on an Opposition motion drawing attention to the Government's handling of an affair which so far has cost the British taxpayer £3.5 billion. Included in that figure is the amount of compensation paid to the livestock industry, which exceeds £1 billion. On the following morning—last Tuesday—with some hon. Friends who are present today, I sat in a room with the parents of a young man who had died from CJD through human growth hormone treatment, and with a young woman whose husband died last year from new variant CJD. The woman has two young children, one of whom was born a week after her husband's death. Both families have gone through the tragedy of caring for a loved one dying from CJD, but the young mother faces the additional burden of the constant worry about the possible consequences for her own health and that of her children.

In the light of the debate the previous night, which concentrated on the economic circumstances of farmers, can the Minister not understand the feelings of such people who have suffered far more than any farmers in the BSE crises but seem to be treated much less favourably? Will he consider carefully which causes more distress to a family: the disease and death of their cattle, or the disease and death of their son or daughter, brother or sister, mother or father?

The total inconsistency of the Government's arguments were only too clear last week. On Monday the Minister of Agriculture, the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), was boasting of MAFF's no-fault compensation to farmers in relation to BSE. On Tuesday, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) who was pressing for no-fault compensation for victims of CJD due to human growth hormone and for their families, stated that

"it must be the first and overriding responsibility of the Department of Health to concentrate on preventing ill health and curing it where it occurs, not on compensating those who have contracted that terrible problem."—[*Official Report*, 18 February 1997; Vol. 290, c. 729-30.]

Although I do not argue with compensating farmers for BSE, could it not also be said—using the Minister's own logic—that the £1 billion-plus compensation could have been used instead on research into BSE prevention and treatment, and better resourcing of the disposal of culled cattle? Could it not also be argued that in the only other instance of a product liability claim being brought against his Department, following the development of human immune deficiency virus among haemophiliac factor 8 recipients, a scheme of no-fault compensation was established?

The Minister is aware that there is an appeal pending against a part of the judgment in the hope of compensation being extended, and that claims other than bereavement and fatal accident cases are being brought by a further group of growth hormone recipients who live in fear of developing CJD. I ask him, however, to consider seriously the alternatives to further lengthy and expensive litigation, which would not only involve one Government Department—the Legal Aid Board—funding action against another, the Department of Health, but more importantly would add to the appalling trauma already faced by those directly affected.

The alternative is agreement to no-fault compensation for all victims of infected cadaveric human growth hormone, including those suffering psychiatric injury as a result of knowing that they may contract CJD, and those who have contracted new variant CJD through the food chain.

I remind the Minister that more than a year ago, on 10 January 1996 in a similar Adjournment debate, I pressed for a judicial inquiry into BSE and CJD. After the announcement by the Secretary of State for Health on 20 March last year as to the likely cause of new variant CJD, I pressed the point again in early-day motion 676. I urged the establishment of an inquiry to investigate both new variant CJD and the contamination of human growth hormone.

The Minister will recall his comment, in his letter to me of 12 November 1996, that the judgment in the human growth hormone court action

"was reached following a very detailed trial which was in many ways more akin to a judicial inquiry".

I remind him of Mr. Justice Morland's remarks in his 84 page judgment after the court hearing. He said:

"Litigation of this scientific complexity on a subject of general importance might be better resolved by an inquisitorial rather than adversarial system".

It is clear that the lack of the kind of independent inquiry that the judge himself pointed towards and which resulted in last year's court action will, if not acted on, result in further expensive and, for the families concerned, distressing litigation. In the event of there being no such inquiry, I understand that the families of victims of new variant CJD will also being taking their cases to court.

I argue for a judicial inquiry because of fears put to me by some very eminent scientists that there has without doubt been a cover-up as to the extent of knowledge of both sources of CJD. I have received indications in the past few days from someone previously employed within MAFF, whose identity will become public shortly, that researchers there were aware of the potential link between CJD and food much earlier than the Government have claimed. He states that their research in 1991-92 identified pathological changes in the muscle of cattle with BSE. As it was known then that other species—goats, mink and hamsters—with a prion disease had muscles containing infection, it should surely have been assumed then that that could also be the case with cattle. No action was taken, and we need to know why this key development was ignored along with a considerable amount of other significant research material that was referred to the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee.

I hope that the Minister will recognise that the direction that I am suggesting addresses not only the scientific concerns but also takes account of the desire of victims' families to know the truth in a way that is perhaps less painful and certainly less expensive than continuing litigation.

10.44 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (South Derbyshire): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) for raising this issue and for allowing me briefly to intervene and to give him what support I can. I do so partly because I once held a post in the Department of Health—I should put it on record that I held it from September 1986 until December 1988 and was therefore not able to participate in the decisions that the hon. Gentleman has outlined—and partly because I have a constituency interest in a young man called Gavin Blandford whose mother has been to see me.

Gavin is one of the walking worried. He is a healthy young man in his 20s and is now 5ft 2in tall. His mother tells me that without the treatment that he has received he would probably not have grown much above 2ft tall, so he gained enormously from the treatment. Nevertheless, he was one of those who received the pituitary gland compound and as a result is very concerned, as are his family. His mother came to see me with great courage, fortitude and dignity, but she also expressed to me her sense of guilt because it was she who encouraged the child to have the treatment and took him to virtually every one of the treatments that he had.

I hope that these problems can be recognised in some way and that some form of recognition and perhaps compensation may be given to such families.

10.45 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I support my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), who put the case for Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease victims most eloquently. I should like to impress upon the Minister the fact that a limited number of people are involved and that they have been divided by the court case and the cut-off date of 1 July 1977. I reiterate my hon. Friend's call for a no-fault compensation scheme for those desperate people.

10.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) has raised an important issue. Although, mercifully, it affects only a few people, it is crucial to them. I have listened carefully to the debate and I am conscious of the close interest that the whole House, and particularly the hon. Gentleman, has shown in the issue. The matter was raised during Health questions last week.

I appreciated the opportunity, afforded to me by the hon. Member for Wakefield, of meeting some of the families of his constituents and others who are affected by this terrible disease. I am sure that he will agree that it was a most moving occasion in my office in the Department of Health. I have said many times, including several times in the House, that of course we have considerable sympathy for all the families who have lost loved ones as a result of that terrible disease and for those who are at risk of getting CJD in future. Of course, they are much larger in number.

I have personal experience of the "well but worried" people whom the hon. Member for Wakefield mentioned, because I have a constituent in that category. I am aware of the real anxiety and distress that the episode has caused. The hon. Gentleman went into the history of the matter and said that, at the time, the human growth hormone treatment programme was regarded as a success story. It was used not just in the United Kingdom but all over the world, to treat many thousands of children who, but for the treatment, would have suffered permanent short stature or in some cases disability or even death. At the time, there were few side effects.

As I am sure hon. Members know, the programme ran from 1959 to 1985 and just under 2,000 children in the United Kingdom were treated during that period. It was successful in helping children grow, and it was in great demand. We should not forget that. That it should now be associated with this appalling disease with these awful consequences is a very real tragedy.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Does the Minister accept that the Government's role in promoting and advocating that treatment imposed on this Government and the Government of which I was a member a moral and legal responsibility for the tragedy with which he has shown sympathy? We want a clear answer on the moral and legal responsibility.

Mr. Horam: That is precisely the question that the judge dealt with when he examined the case. As the hon. Member for Wakefield said in his opening remarks, it was an inquisitorial rather than an adversarial examination of the case.

Mr. Hinchliffe: No, it was not.

Mr. Horam: The judge said that himself. Indeed, only 10 minutes ago, the hon. Gentleman quoted Mr. Justice Morland, who said that it was an inquisitorial examination rather than an adversarial one.

Mr. Hinchliffe: The Minister has misunderstood what I said: I said precisely the opposite. In his summing up, the judge argued that an adversarial system was inappropriate. He said that there should be an inquiry, which is what my hon. Friends and I and the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) are arguing for tonight.

Mr. Horam: I am sorry if there has been a misunderstanding. Mr. Justice Morland said that it was in the nature of an inquisitorial examination and not an adversarial one.

Mr. Hinchliffe: He said that it should be.

Mr. Horam: No, in his summation he said that it was.

The use of human growth hormone ended in 1985, when the link with CJD was firmly established. The growth hormone used now is genetically manufactured by a totally different method, and, I am happy to say, is perfectly safe.

As we now know, CJD has been transmitted through this treatment, and the administration of the treatment programme by the Department of Health and Social Security, as it then was—my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) will remember those days—has been the subject of a full, comprehensive and open hearing in the High Court before Mr. Justice Morland. I repeat the point that that hearing was, in the judge's own words, much more akin to an inquisitorial public inquiry.

Mr. Hinchliffe: No.

Mr. Horam: I am using the judge's words. I have great regard for the hon. Gentleman on the matter, which he pursues with great persistence. I am using the judge's own words, which the hon. Gentleman quoted in his opening remarks. The judge said that the hearing was more akin to an inquisitorial public inquiry than to a conventional adversarial court hearing. The point of the judge's hearing was to try to get at the truth. It was a genuinely sympathetic attempt to get at the truth of the matter—there are possible parallels with the recent treatment in the law courts of Mrs. Blood, when it was apparent that Lord Justice Woolf was more concerned to get at the truth of the matter and to examine the case from the point of view of justice—

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Horam: Let me finish this point.

Lord Justice Woolf was more concerned to examine that case from the point of view of justice and finding the truth than to examine the pure legalities of the matter. It is more difficult for the Department to depart from a judgment that the judge has formed in an attempt to find the truth.

Ms Eagle: I also have a constituent who is in the category of the worried well. The Minister pointed out that only 2,000 people are affected by the treatment and are worried about the danger, so to compensate them would not cost that much. Will the Government consider extremely sympathetically extending to that group of people the same procedures as were extended to the haemophiliacs who were infected with HIV? Surely that is the way forward, rather than more court action.

Mr. Horam: I shall come to that point, but I was dealing with the point that the hon. Member for Wakefield fairly raised about the nature of the inquiry and the judgment by Mr. Justice Morland, who considered the issue in a totally independent way. The hon. Gentleman called for an independent inquiry. Mr. Justice Morland provided an independent inquiry of an inquisitorial nature.

The Department co-operated as far as possible with the full production of all documents and witnesses that could help in the understanding and unravelling of the circumstances surrounding the administration of the treatment. In the end Mr. Justice Morland found that the Department had been negligent in certain aspects of the administration of the programme and we accepted that finding. At all times we have co-operated with the court and we are now anxious to comply with its judgment.

The judge found that the period of negligence started on 1 July 1977, and we accept that. He found that those whose treatment commenced after that date should be compensated and we accept that, too. As a result, we have been anxious to reach agreement on the terms of the compensation, so that a swift settlement can be reached. I am certainly conscious of the time that any Government Department—never mind which party is in power—can take to reach a settlement when such a judgment is delivered, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am keen to reach a settlement as quickly as possible.

We have only just received details of the claims for compensation. The schedule of damages was delivered on 7 February and further information is required before negotiations can commence. I hope that they will be conducted as speedily as possible, so that the matter can be settled rapidly. To some extent, it is still dependent on the legal process. As the hon. Gentleman said, the plaintiffs have made a further appeal against part of the original finding of Mr. Justice Morland.

The hon. Gentleman referred to those whose treatment commenced before 1 July 1977 and continued thereafter. Some of that group have lodged an appeal against the decision of Mr. Justice Morland that plaintiffs who commenced treatment before 1977 and continued afterwards should not get damages. It is their right to lodge such an appeal. The judge specifically stated on several occasions that, in his view, the Department was not negligent in respect of patients who commenced their treatment before 1 July 1977. He concluded that on the balance of probabilities—I believe that he was looking at what happened in 1985, when the treatment finally ended and there was clear proof of a link between the human growth hormone treatment and CJD—the treatment programme would not have been suspended for them and that treatment would have continued after 1977. That was not the Department's conclusion, but the judge's decision.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): My constituent, Mr. Hefferon, whose son died of CJD and who is involved in fighting for others who are affected, will find it difficult to understand why the Minister is hiding behind the judge's words and is obviously intent on making people go to appeal instead of establishing a judicial review now, which is within his power.

Mr. Horam: As I said when I repeated the judge's words to the House, he took an independent view and the case was of an inquisitorial nature rather than an adversarial one. It is more difficult for the Department to depart from an independent view expressed in that way than had it been a plain, straightforward adversarial look at the facts.

The hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) asked why we could not decide to have a no-fault compensation system, as did the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley). The Department of Health has to consider the health facts and where health resources should be best spent. In our view, health resources are better spent on keeping people from getting ill and making them better when they fall ill, than on compensating the families of those who have died. The first call on the Department's funds has to be those who are ill and those who may fall ill. I am sure that the hon. Member for Wakefield understands that very well. In pursuit of that aim, we have funded a counselling service for patients who were treated with human growth hormone, and their families. That service, which is provided—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 25 February 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third Time on Tuesday 4 March.

LEVER PARK BILL *(By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 4 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits System (Discrimination)

1. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to reduce discrimination against couples in the benefit system. [15737]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): We intend to bring the benefits for new lone parents and couples with children more into line. From April 1998, new lone parents will receive the same rate of family premium and child benefit as do married couples with children. Existing claimants will continue to receive the current higher rates of cash benefit, but those rates will not be increased in April 1997. As well as being a more even-handed system, this will save around £0.5 billion a year.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: As my right hon. Friend has confirmed, if his plan for a fairer family benefit system is brought in, it will save £500 million in the long term. If it is not implemented, will that not mean that public expenditure will have to be increased by £500 million or that the benefits of pensioners and disabled people will have to be cut? Has my right hon. Friend had any representations from the Labour party, which believes in what is called a fixed social security budget and which has opposed the reforms all the way through, to find out what benefits it intends to cut?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes a telling point, and the answer is that I am afraid that I have received no reply to the repeated letters that I have sent to the Opposition spokesman to find out what the Labour party intends to replace those savings with, should it, alas, find itself in power. Labour Members have said that they will stick to the departmental budgets laid down by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary for the Treasury. If they are to forgo £500 million from those savings and spend more money on benefits for lone parents, they must, by definition, take it from other groups—families, single people without children, pensioners or the disabled.

Mr. Alan Howarth: What has the Secretary of State to say about the shocking fact that, for one in five couples of working age, neither partner is in work? Is that not because the Government have vastly increased the number of households on means-tested benefits while holding down earnings disregards? Is not the perversity of the Government's policy that, when one partner loses a job, it makes sense for the other to give up work?

Mr. Lilley: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will wish to welcome the decline by some 300,000 in the number of households in the position that he describes. I am sure that he does not wish to give universally benefits to the non-working partner in a household, regardless of the income of the person in work, because he knows full well that that would be prohibitively expensive. He certainly knows that Labour Front Benchers cannot commit themselves to anything like that because they have accepted our spending totals. It is all very well for Labour Back Benchers to demand more money; they should speak to their Front Benchers, who say that our spending totals are exactly right.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my right hon. Friend agree that married couples will welcome those reforms because not only are the reforms fairer to married couples, but they have felt discriminated against in recent years because they have been paying tax out of their pockets to support lone parents? Do not the reforms also pass a clear message that we want to encourage young people to have family relationships in which they are committed to each other and stay together for the sake of their children?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right. There can be no basis in the long term for a less generous benefit system for married couples than exists for lone parents. I welcome the comments of the Chairman of the Social Security Select Committee that, if we seize this nettle, it should be supported by the Opposition. I have not noticed that it is being supported by the Opposition as yet.

Ms Harman: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, for lone mothers, the most important thing is not to depend on benefits paid by other families but to get off benefits and into work? Having cut lone mothers' benefits and abused lone mothers at the Tory party conference with his little list, why has he now given lone mothers a little leaflet? Although it cost £750,000, the leaflet tells lone mothers nothing about jobs, child care or training; it tells them only about how to get more leaflets about more benefits. Will he acknowledge that his policy of saying to lone mothers, "Here is your income support; come back when your youngest child is 16," has left 1 million mothers on income support, 2 million children on the breadline and a £10 billion bill for the taxpayer? Why does not he take up Labour's welfare-to-work proposals and invite lone mothers into the jobcentre for help and advice?

Mr. Lilley: The House will notice that the hon. Lady has not chosen to inform us where she will get the £500 million that she wants to spend on higher benefits for new lone parents.

However, the hon. Lady is right to say that the best possibility for lone parents is to get back to work. That is why we have sustained in-work benefits, notably family credit. That is why we have improved them by giving a child care allowance within family credit. That is why we have improved them further by giving a carry-on of housing benefit at the existing rate for a month after return to work. That is why we are sending out a leaflet spelling out the advantages of getting back to work, spelling out those extra benefits and spelling out the availability of child care help. I am surprised and astonished that the hon. Lady chooses to ridicule it. On second thoughts, I am not surprised: it is typical.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, for far too long, the benefit system has discriminated in favour of lone parents as opposed to married couples and that it is a long-overdue reform that married couples should now receive the same as lone parents? Has he received representations from the Labour party to the effect that it is prepared to pay lone parents another £20 a week on top of what they currently receive, and what would that cost?

Mr. Lilley: I agree with my hon. Friend. He may be unconsciously echoing almost exactly the words of the only Opposition Member who has made similar points—the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who used very similar words. I understand that the Opposition now propose to allow a maintenance disregard, which effectively will give an advantage of up to £20 a week to lone parents who receive maintenance from the absent father as a result of our efforts, so it will be a disincentive for them to return to work. That must militate in exactly the opposite direction to that which the Labour spokesman advocated a few moments ago.

Pensioner Incomes

2. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) of 5 February, *Official Report*, columns *637–38*, if he will uprate pensions in line with earnings. [15738]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): No. If the basic pension had been increased by the higher of earnings or prices since 1980, the total extra burden on the taxpayer would be £8.6 billion in 1997–98.

Mr. Flynn: Does the hon. Gentleman recall the pledge given in the 1979 election campaign that the Conservatives would increase pensions along with the prosperity of the country? In every one of the past 18 years they have cheated on that promise. Pensions will be £62.45 in April; they should be £82.60. Is it not true that, throughout those years, the Conservatives have never honoured that promise, and is it not the case that we cannot trust the Tories on pensions? Will the hon. Gentleman answer without blaming the last Labour Government or the next Labour Government?

Mr. Heald: The last time that the hon. Gentleman asked me about that subject, I costed his proposals at £65 billion by 2030, but, if one takes into account his proposals for income support, that figure is too low—the cumulative figure would be more than £100 billion by then. He might like to ask his Front-Bench team where the cuts would fall to pay for his proposals. However, the Conservative Government have maintained the value of the basic state pension, encouraged private provision and given extra help to those most in need, and average pensioner incomes have increased by 60 per cent.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does my hon. Friend recall that the last time that pensions were uprated with earnings was under the last Labour Government? That was a time when the increase in earnings was less than the rate of inflation, so the population generally were less well off in real terms. The then Government wanted the pensioners to share with the general public being less well off in real terms. It saved money for the Exchequer. The Labour Government did that, not because they believed in it, but because they were required to do so by the International Monetary Fund.

Mr. Heald: Under this Government, average incomes have gone up by as much each year as they did during the whole period of the last Labour Government. One has only to examine Labour's proposal to equalise the state pension age at 60, with a reduced pension of £40 a week, to see that that would spell disaster for those who later required income support and were refused it. Labour has always meant difficulties and poverty for pensioners, and it still would with its current policies.

State Pension

3. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the future of the state retirement pension. [15739]

Mr. Lilley: The basic pension is the cornerstone of income in retirement. We remain committed to protecting the value of state pensions, and they will be increased in line with prices from April at a gross cost of £730 million.

Mrs. Winterton: Bearing in mind that pensioners' incomes have risen 60 per cent. in real terms since 1979, will my right hon. Friend advise pensioners to beware of the Opposition's policies, which would undermine savings by allowing inflation to rise, tax private pension funds that had invested in the privatised utilities, and fail to match the Conservative record of uprating each year the state retirement pension by at least as much as price inflation?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend can be reassured. We will give such warnings loud and clear to all the pensioners in this country. What she says is correct. The utilities tax would bear heavily on the pension funds that pay the pensions of retired people. She is right, too, to warn of the past failure and possible future failure of Labour Governments to uprate the basic pension. They did not do so properly in 1976, and it cost pensioners then £1 billion. Pensioners should be warned that the shadow Chancellor recently said:

"there cannot be an assumption that totals will be automatically adjusted upwards in the event of changes in inflation."

I asked for an assurance from the Opposition that they would continue uprating, but assurance came there none.

Mr. Denham: Will the Secretary of State condemn every Tory candidate who claims that Labour would cut the basic state pension by £20 a week? Will he condemn that concerted lie campaign, which is designed to create alarm and fear among elderly people, or does he support that disgraceful campaign—yes or no?

Mr. Lilley: I happen to have with me a copy of a letter from the shadow spokesman for social security, which she wrote to me spontaneously. It states:

"We anticipate . . . a lower level of basic state pension."

It also states:

"We would seek the advice of the Government Actuary."

I have sought that advice for her. He said that if her objective of making the pension available at age 60 were to be possible without a £15 billion extra cost, it would be necessary to reduce the basic state pension by £20 a week. Accordingly, I am happy to endorse my hon. Friends and candidates who are telling the truth loud and clear, far and wide.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that I took advice from an expert on pensions—my mother? She is 85 years of age and has just moved up to Lichfield. She first went on the state pension in 1972. She tells me that the worst time for pensions was in 1975 and 1976, when inflation was running at 25 per cent. and the Government cut the Christmas bonus. Can my right hon. Friend tell me which party was in power at that time?

Mr. Lilley: I can certainly remind my hon. Friend—I am sure that his expert mother has reminded him, too—that it was the Labour party which failed to uprate basic pensions at that time, which cost pensioners £1 billion and which is now warning us that, in order to keep within the totals that we have established for Departments, it will not necessarily adjust those totals upwards, in line with inflation.

Habitual Residence Test

4. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent assessment his Department has made of the operation of the habitual residence test. [15740]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): Our monitoring of the habitual residence test confirms that it is succeeding in its primary purpose of narrowing access to benefit for people who have little or no recent commitment to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Timms: Does the Minister agree that there are continuing problems with the operation of the test, not least with the inconsistent way that it is being applied by different offices? First, does he agree that benefits offices should be encouraged to work as closely as possible with advice agencies to ensure that people attending habitual residence interviews are well informed beforehand as to what they will be asked and how the questions will be presented? Secondly, has the Minister considered the possibility of helping to provide interpreters when interviewees do not speak good English?

Mr. Evans: I am happy to say yes to both the hon. Gentleman's questions. As to the first, the welfare action rights group in his area of Newham regularly meets the local Benefits Agency representatives to discuss those matters. We are aware of questions about whether the scheme is operating equally in different districts, and that matter has been examined.

Secondly, it is obviously important that interpreters should be provided for those people who require assistance as their command of English is not sufficient, and we shall look into that issue. If the hon. Gentleman has further constituency points to make on the matter, I shall be happy to address them. I have written today to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who has raised similar issues with me.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend accept that the vast majority of taxpayers find it repugnant that individuals think that they can come to this country, present themselves at a social security office, and receive a cheque that is paid for by the British taxpayers, when those individuals have had no connection with this country for many years?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is right. We face some difficulty because European Union nationals are entitled to come to this country and, as a matter of legal entitlement before we introduced the habitual residence test, receive the full range of income-related benefits. We introduced the test because it is the one thing that we are allowed to do under European law, and it is embodied in one of the earliest European Union directives, 408/71.

Income Support (Pensioners)

5. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to ensure that pensioners claim the income support to which they are entitled. [15741]

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): The Department and its agencies take extensive action to publicise income support and other benefits that pensioners may choose to claim. Help is there for those who need it.

Mr. Jones: Clearly, the extensive action that the Minister talks about is completely inadequate. Will he confirm that 1 million pensioners are £14 a week worse off because they do not claim their full entitlement? What effective measures do the Government intend to take in order to deliver their fair and full entitlement to those people who have contributed to this country throughout their lifetime?

Mr. Burt: A range of effective action can be, and is being, taken. The hon. Gentleman may be aware of the campaign that the Benefits Agency ran in January and the document entitled "Pensions and Benefits: a guide for older people". Publicity in the hon. Gentleman's constituency of Cardiff includes weekly benefit sessions at one of the community centres, fortnightly benefit advice at one of the hospitals and monthly benefit advice at another. Regular benefit talks are given to community groups and information appears in the local newspaper, of which I have some copies.

We have discovered over the years that, unless we target campaigns specifically, take-up will not increase. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman has anything

in mind regarding widespread take-up campaigns—those on his Front Bench have not mentioned it. For the time being, the Benefits Agency is doing extensive work in order to advertise benefits for those who need them.

Mrs. Roe: Can my hon. Friend confirm that he has received no workable proposals for identifying additional pensioners who are entitled to income support beyond the measures that the Government are taking already? Will he confirm also that, even if it were possible, paying income support to an extra 700,000 pensioners would cost more than £1 billion? Has he received any representations from the Labour party about what other benefits it would cut by £1 billion in order to remain within a fixed budget?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is often forgotten that more than 1.5 million pensioners already claim some £25 billion. My hon. Friend is correct to say that I have received no workable proposals from Opposition Members regarding a campaign.

Mr. McLeish: What about the fraud Bill?

Mr. Burt: That was not workable. Proposals that use the Inland Revenue, which does not have information on savings, for example, will not do the job. Benefits campaigns must be targeted and, in the absence of any workable proposals, Opposition Members are left spouting empty words and offering no sensible ideas about how to bring more people into benefit.

Mr. McLeish: The Minister's response provides a chilling example of how callously indifferent Ministers are to the plight of Britain's pensioners. Is he not seriously embarrassed that 1 million pensioners in Britain—10 per cent. of the total number of pensioners, or 1,500 pensioners in every constituency—live not on the breadline but below it? Does he not appreciate that that is a blight on Britain's pensioners, who have given so much and are receiving so little from the Government? Will he acknowledge that, in a few weeks' time, a Labour Government will reduce VAT on fuel, provide better health care and start to attack the scandal of Britain in 1997 having 1 million pensioners who are not getting what they are entitled to?

Mr. Burt: The hon. Gentleman is long on rhetoric but short on any practical proposals. I certainly deny the last part of his claims. Pensioners do not claim for a variety of reasons. It is wrong to suggest that all pensioners who do not claim income support are living below poverty levels; many live with families and enjoy the family life style.

It is noticeable that the hon. Gentleman—for all his wind—does not come up with anything specific to bring more people into benefit. He does not give proper credit to the work done by many information officers at Benefits Agency offices throughout the country, who work hard with pensioners' groups and others. It is about time that we heard a little bit of credit for their honest hard work in trying to do their job.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Surely the Labour party is the same party that, a few moments ago, was complaining about information leaflets being sent to single mothers. Were not the Government criticised roundly for television campaigns and for the money that was spent on advertising to tell people about their benefits? Is it not the responsibility of individuals to find out what is available to them and for the Government to do their best, as they do in the clear leaflets that are provided in all social security offices, to get that information to them?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The departmental budget for publicity over the current three-year period is about £84 million. He is right. The Labour party cannot have it both ways: criticising the leaflets and not accepting that we have to get information across to people if benefits provision is to be sensible and good.

Asylum Seekers (Benefits)

6. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the impact of denial of benefits on asylum seekers and their families awaiting (a) a decision or (b) the result of an appeal. [15743]

Mr. Roger Evans: The changes that we introduced last year are reducing financial incentives for illegal immigrants and over-stayers to claim asylum.

Mr. Cohen: Were not the Government humbled and shamed by the Court of Appeal decision on 17 February that asylum seekers should be entitled to food and shelter, not starved as the Government wanted? Were not the Government cruel and wrong to make families, especially children, destitute while the asylum seeker was awaiting his or her appeal to be heard? Will the Government accept that judgment, fully compensate local authorities and now act humanely and responsibly?

Mr. Evans: The answer is simply no. As far as the Collins judgment is concerned, the courts have disturbed a construction of the National Assistance Act 1948 which has stood and been worked on for nearly half a century. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will be pursuing that matter further in the courts.

The hon. Gentleman should also bear in mind that the measures have been strikingly successful in reducing the number of in-country applications. Taking the last quarter of 1996 as opposed to 1995, the number of such applications is down by more than 70 per cent. The gross savings involved in those measures are in the region of £250 million for 1997–98.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does my hon. Friend accept that, from the beginning, it was known that the changes to the benefit rules would have some impact on councils and charities and that councils would in the end be compensated for that? Will not most people think it reasonable and, indeed, justified that those people who came to this country on the basis that they would not be a burden on the state, who would not be able to claim benefits, should continue in that position and not suddenly change their minds and become a burden on the British state?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is right. The three groups that are directly affected by those measures are, first, illegal immigrants; secondly, people who have entered this country saying that they are visitors, business men or students and have means to support themselves; and, thirdly, those who have sought asylum and have had an unfavourable decision from the independent adjudicating authorities, which have said that they are not refugees.

We have met, and are meeting, the extra expense placed on local authorities by special grant orders. We have said that, if voluntary organisations think that a case is genuine and deserving, and if they support that person in the meantime, almost uniquely in the benefits system, if the person wins his appeal, he will receive benefits backdated to the beginning of the period in which he made his claim.

Child Support Agency

7. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what criteria are used by the CSA to decide which parent has care of the children when parents have separated but are still living in the same house with their children. [15744]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Andrew Mitchell): The Child Support Agency can take on a case only where the parents genuinely maintain separate households. The "parent with care" is the parent who cares for a child for the greater number of nights or, if neither parent satisfies that criterion, the parent who receives child benefit for the child.

Mr. Rendel: Does not that lead to unfairness in some cases? For example, one of my constituents owns the house in which his ex-wife still lives rent-free. He pays for the housing costs and most of the clothing and food costs of his children. He is not even allowed to claim shared care, on the grounds that there is no date on which the children leave the home in which the mother lives to move to the home in which the father lives. Of course there is not, because they live in the same home the whole time.

Mr. Mitchell: I have looked at the specific case that the hon. Gentleman raises. His constituents share a house, but they say that they maintain separate households, and they disagree on the amount of shared care under consideration. During the period in question, the hon. Gentleman's constituent was abroad for six months, so it is difficult to see how he can have had shared care in that time. If the circumstances change, he can appeal. He has already made an appeal, and it will be heard in due course. It seems to me that the agency has handled that specific case correctly.

There has been a rapid improvement in the service provided by the Child Support Agency in the past 18 months. There is still a long way to go, but, in the words of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security, the CSA is now running "rather well".

Sir David Mitchell: Would my hon. and filial Friend look into the case of my constituent Mr. Flint? He remarried, had twins, received a pay increase of £31 a month and, on reassessment by the CSA, had his maintenance payments increased by £41 a month. Would my hon. and filial Friend investigate that case further and see what he can do to put it right?

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me notice of that question. He sets a good example to the House for diligent representation of one's constituents. I shall look into the case, but although his constituent has recently had the happy arrival of twins, he has also had a significant pay rise of 20 per cent.

Mr. Wicks: I am sure that the last two hon. Gentlemen who spoke have benefited from effective child maintenance policies during their lives. On a more serious note, will the Minister confirm that, all these years after the Child Support Act 1991, the great majority of lone mothers and their children receive no child maintenance? Does he accept that, in the absence of an effective and acceptable child maintenance policy, complemented by a welfare-to-work strategy, most lone mothers and their children are trapped in a dependency state on income support? Does he agree that that is bad news for the taxpayer, bad news for the mothers, and, most important, tragic for the children?

Mr. Mitchell: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's first point. He is wrong to say that most parents and children do not receive maintenance. Recent published figures show that 78 per cent. of the mothers who have come within the remit of the CSA receive maintenance in part or in full.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, the Government have introduced a welfare-into-work strategy. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has described the parent plus scheme as one of the best schemes anywhere in the world. It will be extremely effective in ensuring that lone parents have opportunities to get back into work. While the Government are establishing a scheme and putting money on the table to run it, all we get from the Labour party is pious waffle and pre-electioneering soundbites, which will do no good and will not help lone parents.

Child Care

8. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment his Department has made of the availability of child care for lone parents. [15745]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The Government have taken, and are taking, effective steps to help those who need child care in order to work.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Minister tell us at last why lone parents in Britain are the most dependent on benefits, and the least likely to work, in the whole of Europe? Is he not concerned about the fact that that is costing the taxpayer more than £10 billion a year, and that the figure is rising? Is there not an urgent need for a national child care strategy?

Mr. Mitchell: The Government have made a good many changes specifically to help with child care costs. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the workings of family credit, and will know that the child care disregard was recently increased from £40 to £60. He should also know that, since 1993, the Department for Education and

Employment has provided start-up grants which have generated more than 72,000 out-of-school child care places, and that, in his recent Budget, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer put £24 million on the table for further out-of-school places. We have invested £64 million in that scheme.

Again, all we hear from the Opposition is a reannouncement of our policies, along with a load of pre-election wind. The Government's out-of-school child care policies have been very successful.

Mr. Viggers: A typical lone parent is a woman bringing up children, but is my hon. Friend aware that I have been corresponding with his Department about a different classification—men who are widowers, and have the dual problem of trying to do their jobs and bring up their children at the same time? Will my hon. Friend take full account of widowers' interests in shaping Government support measures?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. As he implied, some 5 per cent. of lone parents are men. I shall bear in mind what he has said.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the steps that the Government have taken, but Ministers will know that children under 16 should not be left unattended. At times, that is very difficult for mothers who are alone—not necessarily because they are single parents but for other reasons: for instance, their husbands may be serving abroad. Have the Government taken account of that clash between the law and pressures on mothers bringing up children? Those mothers need more family credit.

Mr. Mitchell: The Government recognise the tension to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. In such circumstances, they consider it right for a mother to choose whether to work or to remain on benefit. They also point out, however, that the way out of benefit and towards independence is returning to work. It is not good for a child to see the state as the sole breadwinner: it is important for the parent also to be seen as the breadwinner.

Discrimination (Disabled Persons)

9. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps the Government are taking to prevent discrimination against disabled persons. [15746]

Mr. Burt: The Government introduced the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to spearhead the fight to prevent discrimination against disabled people. On 2 December, we implemented new rights for disabled people in employment, and in accessing goods and services. The Act is essential if disabled people are to live their lives fully and independently.

Mr. Robinson: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. How are the Government helping the National Disability Council in its task of monitoring the Act?

Mr. Burt: We fund the National Disability Council—which is charged to deliver advice, either on our invitation or on its own initiative—for all aspects of monitoring anti-discrimination legislation in the United Kingdom.

The council differs from a commission. I noticed during last night's debate that the Labour party had changed its position crucially. It, and some members of the disability lobby, originally intended a commission to deal with cases on behalf of disabled people, but last night the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) excluded that definition from his description of the commission's work. I want to know whether that was because Labour agrees with us that a commission is not necessary because disabled people enforce individual rights, or whether, again, it is because Labour has been left without a budget, and would therefore have a commission in name only. The National Disability Council can do a much better job.

Ms Lynne: The Minister said in the debate on health yesterday that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was the flagship of Government policy on disabled people. If that is the case, why cannot it be used to force building societies such as the Halifax to give share options to the second named account holder, most of whom are disabled people? If the Act cannot be used in that way, surely he must agree that his flagship is missing at least a couple of masts.

Mr. Burt: The hon. Lady will probably be aware that there is a dispute of opinion about whether the action by the building societies contravenes the Act. I believe that someone is preparing to test it because the Act does prevent discrimination against disabled people and it may yet cover that situation. However, to avoid doubt, I think that the House would welcome the action taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French), who has introduced the Building Societies (Distributions) Bill, which will ensure that this problem does not happen in future. We have been delighted to give support and encouragement to his work.

Mr. Llwyd: Is the Minister aware that some 43,000 women in the United Kingdom are discriminated against because, when they reach the age of 60, their incapacity benefit is discontinued, whereas if they were male it would continue until the age of 65? Does he know that, during an Adjournment debate last week, I had the privilege of debating that point and his colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, told me, "Yes, it is discrimination, but don't worry: the Government will put it right in 2020."?

Mr. Burt: I do not think the hon. Gentleman has it right. This is covered by the Graham case, which has been taken to the European Court of Justice. Our policies have been found not to be discriminatory in the way that he describes. This has been fully tested by the court and the British Government's position has been upheld.

Child Benefit Register

10. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the provision of information on the child benefit register to other Government Departments and local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [15747]

Mr. Heald: Although no representations have been received by my right hon. Friend, I know that a variety of uses have been suggested for the child benefit database, for example as part of efforts to combat truancy.

Mr. Thurnham: Following the tragic disappearance and death of young Tommy Oakes in Bolton, will the Minister consider allowing local authorities access to the child benefit register to try to trace a missing youngster, and does not Bolton's new pupil attendance register allow child benefit to be linked to school attendance?

Mr. Heald: I know that the hon. Gentleman has taken a particular interest in the case of Tommy Oakes, and that my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), the Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment, has taken an interest in the Bolton scheme to set up a register of school attendance, but it is too early to evaluate that scheme fully. The French scheme, which the hon. Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham) has also raised with me, has been rarely enforced. The Benefits Agency co-operates with social services in cases involving children who are at risk, but child benefit data are sensitive and data protection has to be considered.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my hon. Friend confirm that children between the ages of 16 and 18 would lose all chance of being on the child benefit register if benefit were taken away from them, as Labour proposes to do?

Mr. Heald: It is, I suppose, a particularly stupid idea to impose on parents of 16 to 18-year-olds a tax that means that they cannot support their children through the difficult years when their children are training. For Labour—which talks so often of training—to suggest that is particularly stupid. I know that my hon. Friend has made that point on a number of occasions.

Parent Plus Scheme

11. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of lone parents who will be eligible for the parent plus scheme. [15748]

Mr. Lilley: The parent plus scheme is a key part of our strategy to reduce benefit dependency by encouraging lone parents to support themselves and their families through work. We estimate that the scheme will offer advice and help to up to 100,000 lone parents on income support who wish to return to work.

Mr. Sheerman: Where have the Government been for the past 17 years? A dependency culture has grown over those 17 years, year on year, and ever more young lone mothers depend on low benefits. Those young mothers want an opportunity culture, not a dependency culture. It is too late for this Government, but the new Labour Government will introduce opportunity, not dependency, for those mothers.

Mr. Lilley: We have been here: introducing family credit to help lone parents back into work; extending aid to provide a child care disregard to help lone parents back into work; and introducing parent plus to help lone parents back into work. The Leader of the Opposition—who has just entered the Chamber—goes off to Amsterdam to announce Labour's policy to help lone parents back into work, as well he might. The second plank of his plan was that he

"would relax the 16 hour rule for lone parents under 25 and without qualifications."

He should know that there is no limit on the amount of study that lone parents can undertake. Therefore, he was completely misinformed. It is no wonder that he goes abroad to make speeches about domestic policy. If he made them at home, he would be laughed out of court.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 February. [15767]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the Prime Minister join me in condemning the Ministers and Conservative Back Benchers who queued up yesterday to denigrate the reputation and character of the former Prime Minister and Father of the House? Does he agree that such attempts to vilify the Father of the House do great damage generally to the democratic process and particularly to the reputation of the Prime Minister and his Ministers?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) has had a long and distinguished career. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] We admire him and are fond of him.

Q2. **Sir Michael Shersby:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 February. [15768]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Sir Michael Shersby: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the privatisation of British Rail has been a great success story—so successful that it has confounded its critics? Is he aware that many of my constituents would like the same principles to be applied to London Underground, particularly if the proceeds were ploughed back into further investment?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will make a statement on that matter very shortly. The plans that he will announce will give London the world-class underground network that we wish it to have. We will expect standards and investment to rise while prices do not.

Mr. Blair: Most people remember who has been in charge of London Underground for 18 years. May I lead on from the question to the Prime Minister asked by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby)? The Transport Secretary has said that any proceeds from

selling London Underground will go back into transport investment. This morning, however, the Chancellor said that he is relying on at least some of those proceeds as greatly benefiting the Exchequer to pay off Government borrowing. Who is right?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman will contain himself for a moment, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will make a statement that will answer all the questions that he and his hon. Friends are likely to ask about the proposed future of London Underground, but I shall not anticipate his statement.

Mr. Blair: I am not asking the Prime Minister to anticipate the statement—

Hon. Members: You are.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Blair: I am asking him to comment on the Chancellor's remarks this morning. The Chancellor said that some of the proceeds would be used to pay off the national debt, which he has doubled. Is that correct? If all the proceeds do not go back into transport, what will happen if they do not cover the investment requirement? Will the customer pay more, will the public pay more or will the service be cut? I think that the Prime Minister should tell us.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman will be told in detail and at length by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport in just a few moments. The privatisation of any industry is always a complex matter. It deserves to be set out clearly, comprehensively and at length, which my right hon. Friend will do shortly.

Mr. Blair: I assume that the Transport Secretary will tell us the precise percentage of money that will be reinvested in transport. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may shout, but is not London Underground worth £7 billion to £13 billion, and do not many people fear that, once again, a key public service will be sold off at a fraction of its true value so that a few people can make a vastly inflated profit with no guarantee of a proper service for the future?

The Prime Minister: The answer to each of the right hon. Gentleman's questions is no. He is wrong on almost every point, as will become clear in a few moments. I find it extraordinary that the only two places in the world where privatisation is reviled and state ownership preferred are the Labour party and North Korea. No wonder the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) called the right hon. Gentleman the Kim Il Sung of the Labour party.

Mr. Norris: Does my right hon. Friend agree that not the least of the advantages of the privatisation of London Underground would be the substantial capital receipts that could be reinvested in the system? How could any Government who voluntarily chose to deny themselves that capital receipt make good that funding other than through a substantial increase in public expenditure and the taxation necessary to raise it?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is correct, of course. I find it odd that the Labour party criticises the level of investment in London Underground when the shadow Chancellor is committed lock, stock and barrel to every penny of my right hon. and learned Friend's spending plans, except that the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has a £12 billion black hole in his plans, as he has failed to understand ours.

Q3. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 February. [15769]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I return the Prime Minister to what is clearly a central contradiction in his programme for the general election—the statement by a former Prime Minister, Mr. Edward Heath—[HON. MEMBERS: "Sir."] Forgive me, Madam Speaker. Sir Edward Heath—[HON. MEMBERS: "Order."]—a former Prime Minister, who said that he agreed with the Labour party. He said that we were right on the social chapter, the national minimum wage and devolution. He agrees with us. Who is now standing up for the tradition of the Conservative party? Is it the Father of the House, a former Prime Minister, or is it the current Prime Minister, who has been manipulated by a bunch of extremists on his Back Benches?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman sits beside a bunch of people whom I would never consider calling extremists, but who hold almost every possible view on Europe and every other issue, so I find his question distinctly rum. It deserves to be ignored, which I shall do.

Mr. Amess: Is my right hon. Friend aware that tomorrow, Her Majesty the Queen, in the presence of the President of Israel, will unveil a monument to Raul Wallenberg—a man whose bravery is an example to us all? Will my right hon. Friend also support the efforts of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to find out exactly what happened to Raul Wallenberg 50 years ago?

The Prime Minister: I think that everyone will happily support my hon. Friend's request. The unveiling of the statue tomorrow is a welcome development and a just recognition of a great man who saved many lives during the last world war.

Q4. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 February. [15770]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Home Robertson: Lady Thatcher said back in 1974 that the establishment of a Scottish Assembly was a top priority. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) has now confirmed that the establishment of a Scottish Parliament poses no danger to the integrity of the United Kingdom. Can the Prime Minister remember the last time his two predecessors

agreed with each other about anything? How has he got himself into a position in which he appears to disagree with both of them?

The Prime Minister *rose—*

Mr. Home Robertson: Wait for it. Is the Prime Minister sure that Britain's fossilised constitution is the securest ground to choose for Major's last stand?

The Prime Minister: It really was not worth waiting for, I have to tell the hon. Gentleman. He is trying to pick out what my noble Friend Lady Thatcher and my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said 20 years ago. What the leader of the Labour party said in 1983 is contradicted today by the leader of the Labour party in every particular. The proposals of 20 years ago that the hon. Gentleman referred to were not comparable with the tax-raising monstrosity proposed by the Labour party today.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend will need no reminding that any objective assessment of economic trends in Europe shows that Britain is now winning. Does he share the bewilderment of a number of foreign commentators, who cannot understand the logic of saying that it is time for a change? "Does that mean that you want to be losers?" they wonder. Will my right hon. Friend use every effort to make sure that that weird logic is not accepted by the British people?

The Prime Minister: I certainly undertake to do as my hon. Friend recommends. The economic criteria right the way down the board—growth, investment or the fall in unemployment—make it patently obvious to those who wish to examine the figures for a moment that the United Kingdom is out-performing most of its comparable continental rivals. That is because of the policies that we have followed. The policies that they have followed, which have led them into greater difficulty, are the policies advocated by the Opposition parties.

Q5. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 February. [15771]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Prentice: The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) referred to the alleged success of railway privatisation, whereby £19 billion of public assets went under the hammer for less than £2 billion. Is it not a disgrace that £13 billion of assets resting in London Underground could be sold off in a fire sale for less than £600 million?

The Prime Minister: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman, like his right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party, waits for the statement that will follow in a few moments.

Mr. Prentice *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman produces all sorts of disparaging gestures. The interesting fact about the new Labour party is that it does not wish to know the arguments and it does not wish to know the facts; it just wants to parade the soundbites and prejudice invented by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson).

Mr. Allason: May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the commitment—which became a promise, which became a pledge, which then became a withdrawal—by the Liberal Democrats to scrap the Christmas bonus in favour of an extra week's income? Does he agree that the best thing for pensioners, especially those in the south-west, is lower bills, which means no windfall levy on South West Water, whose customers are already paying far too much for their water?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree that a windfall tax would undoubtedly add to the cost of fuel, water and other utilities—how much, of course, we do not know, because the shadow Chancellor either does not know what his plans really are or cannot say. It was very unkind of my hon. Friend to draw attention to the consistency of the Liberal Democrats concerning the retired.

Q6. **Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 February. [15772]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Davies: What discussions does the Prime Minister intend to have with Governments of other nations to ensure that there are adequate international controls over the cloning of animals and other life forms?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is examining what discussions may be appropriate.

London Underground

Madam Speaker: Statement—Sir George Young.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Points of order come after statements, as I am sure the hon. Member recalls.

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): With permission, I should like to make a statement about our proposals for the future of London Underground.

London Underground is the last of the traditional transport nationalised industries, and the only major transport operator that is not in the private sector. Since 1979, we have privatised a wide range of transport businesses—for example, British Airways, the British Airports Authority and, indeed, London Transport's bus operating companies. All of them have gone on to prosper, raising money from the market to invest in better services for their customers. Only London Underground remains in the public sector, its status becoming increasingly anomalous.

Most recently, we have of course privatised the national passenger rail network—a process that has now been completed, with the award of the last franchise for ScotRail. The benefits are already becoming apparent: an increase in passenger numbers; and new investment is already taking place or is in the pipeline. Railtrack has plans to spend £4 million a day on maintaining and renewing the rail network, and on stations, depots and network enhancements. By 2001, Railtrack estimates that it will have spent £1 billion more than the regulator expected. In addition, franchisees are committed to investing around £1.5 billion in new rolling stock and more than £100 million in improvements to stations and other facilities.

The decisions to proceed with Thameslink 2000 and the channel tunnel rail link show that major new projects can be undertaken within a privatised railway. Benefits for rail users are being achieved at a decreasing cost to the taxpayer. In seven years' time, the private sector franchisees will require only about 40 per cent. of the support that British Rail estimated it would have needed to run the same services this year. Rail privatisation has shown that the fact that an industry is loss-making is no barrier to its successful transfer to the private sector.

Against that background, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced in October that we would be considering whether the benefits of privatisation could be extended to London Underground. We have completed the initial stages of that work and the Government have concluded that privatisation is the right way forward. The package that I will outline to the House will deliver a higher-quality underground at an affordable cost to passengers and no extra cost to the taxpayer.

Our purpose is to structure the privatisation so as to ensure that the underground is brought up to modern standards as soon as possible. Our aim is to complete the modernisation and improvement programme—that is the elimination of the investment backlog—within five years of privatisation. In recent years, London Underground's management has raised customer satisfaction by a sixth, increased scheduled train services to a level not seen in 25 years, increased the underground's operating surplus from nothing to around £200 million a year, and reduced the investment backlog from £2 billion to £1.2 billion. Despite those great strides, much remains to be done if we are to achieve the standards of service that passengers want, at a cost which they and taxpayers can afford.

We believe that privatisation is the only means of achieving these goals. Privatisation will enable the private sector to invest in the network and respond to passengers' needs, unconstrained by the restrictions of public expenditure controls, and will create the stable financial environment which is simply not achievable in the public sector, with all the other competing demands on taxpayers' money. We want to privatise London Underground as soon as possible so that passengers can start enjoying these benefits without delay.

In deciding on the detailed structure for the privatised underground, we shall need to take account of the network's unique nature and operating characteristics, and to obtain further technical and financial advice. Specifically, detailed work will now begin on three possible models: the sale of London Underground as a single business; the sale or franchising of vertically integrated lines or groups of lines, under which a single operator would be responsible for the stations, track and trains on each line or group of lines; or a structure like the national railways model, with a track authority owning the network and franchisees running trains on individual lines or groups of lines.

We are already consulting London Transport and the railway inspectorate, and we shall now widen our discussions to involve the other key players in the railway industry, and those with an interest in London's transport system, such as the London Pride Partnership and the London Regional Passengers Committee. We also intend to start the process of appointing advisers. Our aim is to publish in the summer a White Paper with our detailed proposals for the best structural option for the future of the underground.

As with previous privatisations, there have been a number of scare stories in the media in recent weeks. I want to set the record straight by giving 10 commitments to passengers and employees. First, safety must always be a top priority. I shall be consulting the Health and Safety Commission in order to ensure that, whichever structural option we adopt, the very high safety standards of the network are maintained.

Secondly, we are committed to a fully integrated network for passengers, including through-ticketing and freedom of interchange between lines. There is no question of breaking up the network. Passengers will be able to use different lines for a journey and to choose the most suitable route, using one ticket in exactly the way that they do now.

Thirdly, the London travelcard will be retained. Regular tube users attach great value to the travelcard, which allows people to use the same ticket to travel by underground, rail or bus, without any restriction on the number of journeys they make. It is used by around a million people a day and accounts for more than two thirds of underground journeys. Our proposals will explicitly safeguard its future.

Fourthly, the existing Londonwide concessionary fares arrangements, which are of critical importance to many elderly and disabled people who rely on public transport, will not be affected by our proposals. Fifthly, on wider share ownership, we shall seek ways of encouraging employees and passengers to acquire a real stake in the privatised underground.

Sixthly, for underground employees, pensions and travel concessions at the time of privatisation will be safeguarded. Again, depending on the option we choose, we will be seeking to encourage employees to participate in management or employee buy-outs.

Seventhly, we shall ensure that the private sector will be required to provide a guaranteed level of service broadly safeguarding the existing level of provision. The regulatory authority supervising the privatised underground, which will be independent of the train operators, will agree to changes in service levels only after carefully considering the benefits to passengers. Again, that is a wholly new safeguard.

The eighth commitment concerns station safeguards. We shall retain strong and effective statutory procedures to deal with any proposals to close stations. The safeguards will be just as rigorous as those that already apply to London Underground and to the national rail network.

The ninth commitment is that we shall introduce controls on fares. The guiding principle will be that, for at least the first four years after privatisation, average fare rises will be no more than inflation. That is a new safeguard; underground fares have not previously been capped.

We also intend to restrain fares in the run-up to privatisation, by capping average fare increases at inflation plus 1 per cent. a year. Again, there has been no such explicit protection in the past, and in practice fares have tended to rise faster than that. The House will recall, for example, that between 1974 and 1979 fares increased by 45 per cent. in real terms.

That brings me to the 10th commitment, on investment. In the recent debate about the future of London Underground, a consensus emerged on two key principles with which I believe that the whole House can agree.

First, it must be a top priority to accelerate investment in London Underground so as to bring the network up to the standards that passengers can reasonably expect for the 21st century. Secondly, that goal can be achieved only if we create a stable funding regime that will enable investment to be planned ahead with confidence.

We are therefore developing a special funding regime for recycling privatisation proceeds into investment, which recognises the unique situation and needs of the underground. Receipts from privatisation will be recycled to ensure that the modernisation of the underground's infrastructure is completed as quickly as possible, building on the work that London Underground is already doing.

Our aim is to achieve that end within five years of privatisation, with the private sector operator committing himself to modernising the assets for which he is responsible, in return for a guaranteed level of Government support to supplement the investment funds that he himself will raise.

After privatisation proceeds have been recycled to complete the modernisation of the tube network, most of any remaining surplus will be channelled into additional support for London Underground, or for transport investment elsewhere in London or in other parts of the country.

As for modernising the underground's basic infrastructure, the House will appreciate that there is a maximum level of annual investment beyond which it is not practicable to go. At a certain point, for example, disruptions to services from renewal works across the network would become too great, or the programme would be beyond the capacity of the supply industry. Subject to those practical constraints, we aim to privatise the underground in such a way that the network is modernised as soon as possible.

London Underground estimates that the upper limit for sensible investment in the core underground each year is about £750 million. Of course, passengers are interested in the results of investment—punctual and reliable services—not in the sums spent. I believe that the private sector will be able to deliver the results that passengers want, more efficiently.

Privatisation and the new regulatory regime will focus on the results of investment. But assuming that annual investment would be about £750 million, about £350 million a year would be needed to maintain the network and to renew assets as they became too old. The remaining investment would be aimed at eliminating the results of the under-investment in the underground in the 1960s and 1970s.

Sustained annual investment of about £750 million in the core underground would be significantly above what has been managed before. In real terms, that is more than four times what was achieved in the 1970s, three times the investment made in the 1980s, and 50 per cent. more than the investment made so far in the 1990s. I do not believe that that rate of progress would be possible if London Underground were to remain in the public sector.

The 10 commitments that I have given today show our determination to protect and enhance the aspects of the underground that are valued by tube users and by Londoners generally. At the same time, privatisation will introduce private sector capital, ideas and energy to increase investment and to raise standards.

That is an outstanding package for tube users and for Londoners. I do not believe that anything as attractive would be possible under continued public ownership, and I commend to the House the principle of privatising London Underground.

Mr. Gale: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I take points of order after statements.

Mr. Gale: The statement has been made.

Madam Speaker: A statement is a continuation of Question Time. It has always been the tradition that we take points of order after questions.

Mr. Gale: My point of order is relevant to the statement.

Madam Speaker: In that case, perhaps it could be put in the form of a question to the Secretary of State—if the hon. Gentleman catches my eye. There may be a glint in it already, but he must wait.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): Is not this statement the ultimate Tory abdication of responsibility for transport in London, neither equipping London for the future nor making good the mistakes of the past? Is it not totally half-baked when the Secretary of State cannot tell us whether privatisation will be sale as a job lot, line by line, or as a track company and franchises? What makes him think that it will work, when he cannot even tell us how it will be done?

The Secretary of State referred to a guaranteed level of Government support. How much will that be? Is not there confusion at the very heart of Government when the Secretary of State tries to have us believe that the proceeds will go into the tube but the Chancellor tells a news conference this morning that he is relying on the money to balance his Budget? Does not that show that, having neglected the tube for years, with so much decay and disrepair, all the Tories have left is the dogma of run it down and sell it off, regardless of passengers' interests?

What confidence can the public have in the Secretary of State's list of commitments when in one breath he tells us that he is considering selling off the lines separately and in the next that there is no question of breaking up the network? Does he recall his words in the leaked letter of earlier this month? He said:

"I do not want to set existing service patterns in stone—some services may well be uneconomic".

Was not his statement so qualified as to leave the way open for services to be cut and stations closed?

The Secretary of State extolled the benefits of rail privatisation. Is not the truth that under the Tories London would be threatened with the same chaos on the tube as we have just witnessed on South West Trains?

What notice has the Secretary of State taken of the warning from the chairman of London Transport, who said that privatising the tube was like putting a house on the market when the walls were falling down? What valuation has he made of the assets? Has he changed the estimate in his previous leaked memo that the sale could raise less than a tenth of the £13 billion reported value?

As with all the other privatisation excesses, would not this mean more fortunes for a few and misery for the many? Will the Secretary of State confirm what he said in that leaked letter: that it could cost more in subsidy to privatise the underground than the Government get back in sale proceeds?

How can privatisation some time in the next century raise the investment that is needed now? Would it not be far better to get moving straight away with public-private partnerships as Labour has proposed? Is not privatisation a desperate move by a Government bankrupt of ideas? Does not their dithering show that they know the dangers involved, and does the Secretary of State still agree with the Chief Secretary's assessment that the underground will be

"a unique and very difficult privatisation to sell to the public"?

Is not this privatisation bad for London, bad for passengers and bad for taxpayers, because the Secretary of State can give no definitive guarantees about services or investment levels and cannot even tell us how much of the money raised he would use for investment? This is a privatisation that the British people will throw out at the ballot box, along with the Government who dreamed it up.

Sir George Young: I am disappointed that the Leader of the Opposition, who asked several questions about the privatisation of London Underground, did not stay to hear the statement.

The House and, indeed, Londoners will be deeply disappointed by the response of the shadow Secretary of State for Transport, which offered no hope and no commitment. Old Labour will not let him privatise; new Labour will not let him spend more. He is a shadow Transport Minister with nowhere to go. We have a coherent strategy. We have identified the funding and the commitments. We believe that it is an attractive proposition for Londoners.

The confusion on privatisation comes from Opposition Members, as we saw at the weekend over the Tote. One day they were to privatise it, the next they were not, and on the third day, they discovered that it was not theirs to privatise. The same will happen with this privatisation as has happened with every other privatisation: they will oppose it before we do it and afterwards say that it was perhaps a good idea after all.

On the hon. Gentleman's specific question, we shall require the private sector to modernise the underground's infrastructure as soon as possible. That will entail a given amount of Government subsidy, the amount to be tested in the market. That subsidy will be recycled from the privatisation proceeds that we receive. If, as we expect, there are proceeds left over, the majority will go to additional investment in London Underground or for other transport investment. The message to Londoners is this: mind the gap between what we offer for their underground and what the Labour party does not offer.

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who oppose the privatisation of London Underground must explain why it should be an exception from a philosophy that has been such a success not only in this country but throughout the world? Does he further agree that those who in the final days of the Greater London council poured public money into fares subsidy rather than investment will find it difficult to make that case?

Sir George Young: I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend. It is true that, in the 1970s, resources did not go into catching up with the backlog but into keeping fares down. It is that backlog that we are trying to deal with. We have got it down from £2 billion to £1.2 billion over the past 10 years. I want to make faster progress with clearing that backlog. I believe that privatisation in the way that I have outlined is the key to that. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his support.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): Does the Secretary of State recall that his predecessor, at the beginning of rail privatisation, told the House that there would be no hiatus in investment? We have had four years of virtually no investment in our railways. [HON. MEMBERS: "What?] Up to now. The Secretary of State said that he expected the shortfall in investment to be made good over five years. If we take British Rail as an example, London Underground could be short of essential investment up to the millennium. That could leave the system in a state of disrepair, with services being cancelled and safety compromised.

Surely he understands that the huge asset value of London Underground means that there are other options for raising the money necessary to bring it up to a decent modern metro standard. Surely he sees the sense of allowing it to use its assets as a resource to borrow money and get the investment that it desperately needs now to give Londoners an underground system in which they can again take pride.

Sir George Young: If the hon. Gentleman wants to outline a conventional approach of increasing public expenditure funded by increased borrowing or higher taxation, he should come into the open and do so. He is wrong about investment. In real terms, investment is 50 per cent. above the level of the 1980s, and twice the level of the 1970s. On top of that, the Jubilee line extension is due to be completed in March next year. On current investment, this year's settlement left provision for the LT core business in 1997–98 unchanged. With private finance investment, total investment in the core business over the next three years should total around £1.5 billion. That compares with London Underground's estimate that £350 million needs to be spent each year on average to prevent the tube's backlog from getting larger. That puts the matter into better perspective.

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): May I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on his announcement? After many years of trying to improve London Underground, those of us who live in London and use it all the time will welcome the opportunity for investment in London Underground continuing year on year rather than having to be considered annually. That has been one reason why it has been so difficult to plan and improve investment in London Underground. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that users of the Northern line, which culminates in my constituency, can look forward at long last to a programme that will improve both the stations and the running of that line so that they can get to and from their work comfortably, on time and at ease with the whole programme?

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend is right. London Underground wants stability and confidence of funding for its long-term programme so that it can have a strategic approach. So long as it remains in the public sector, under whatever Government, it will be subject to the annual bids and counter-bids of the public expenditure round. Putting it outside the public sector guarantees it continuity of funding.

My right hon. Friend will know that new trains for the Northern line are on the way. As I outlined in my statement, it is my ambition that, within five years of privatisation, the backlog will have been removed. I have heard no other scenario that achieves that objective in that time scale.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Does the Secretary of State agree that the unhappy, packed travellers who are increasingly jammed in on an unsafe and ancient system will understand that his proposal is not a means of acquiring new investment, or of changing the savage cuts that he has imposed this year, which have put back safety measures like the replacement of escalators for at least two years, but a simple commitment to a brutal transference of taxpayers' assets at well below their worth? As with rail privatisation, large sums of money will go to accountants, estate agents and lawyers, without a penny going into a new rail system.

Sir George Young: What we have not heard so far from the Opposition is an alternative strategy for getting the necessary resources to drive up the quality and quantity of investment in the London underground. The Opposition are unable to match the offer that I have put before the House. On the hon. Lady's specific points, there has been no reduction in next year's resources from this Government for London Underground. So, far from being a "brutal" privatisation, it is a user-friendly privatisation with a transparency that we have not had before, with receipts being recycled back into the underground for the benefit of passengers. The hon. Lady's description of that as "brutal" defies belief.

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Opposition's reaction was reminiscent of what they said when rail privatisation was first announced and that, in practice, all their threats and fears have been proved to be wrong? Will it not be the same in this case? Will not they quickly forget the words that they have used today? I agree with my right hon. Friend about capital investment. Given the shadow Chancellor's position and the many demands which Labour Back Benchers would make for other public expenditure if the Labour party ever came to power, is it not clear that there would be no hope of capital investment in London Underground under a Labour Government?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He has been around the course before me in respect of British Rail, and I am inspired by his example. Last week we heard Railtrack's statement on its network management strategy for spending sums that would simply have been beyond our reach had the railways remained in the public sector. That is the goal that we want to secure for London Underground. My right hon. Friend is also right to contrast the posturing that we are seeing now with the reaction that we shall see in a few years' time, once we have successfully privatised London Underground. Labour Members will have to eat their words and recognise once again that our privatisation policy was the right approach.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): Is the Secretary of State really suggesting that London Underground will be sold off and that the receipts from privatisation will go back into London Underground, thus enhancing the value of the undertaking to the private owner? Is it not rather like me selling my house to the Secretary of State and then giving him the receipts of the sale to improve the house? It is like a burglar breaking in and then being given the compensation that the victim receives from the insurance company. Where is the economic model and sense in such a proposal?

When the Secretary of State sets his mind to getting the value of London Underground, will he take into account the enormous redevelopment value of the underground stations throughout the capital city? Lastly, will he tell us which other capital city with a metro system like ours has put it into private ownership?

Sir George Young: This Government are happy to lead the world in their policy on privatisation, and I am confident that others will follow us in our privatisation of London Underground, as they have followed us in privatisation of other state-owned industries. I did not follow the logic of the hon. Gentleman's questions.

Mr. Tony Banks: No, because there is none.

Sir George Young: Let me try to explain to him that the London Underground has value as a business, from two sources, and privatisation will crystallise that value. First, London Underground is already making an operating surplus, which covers part of the investment programme. London Transport expects the operating surplus to grow substantially. Secondly, a privatised underground will be much more efficient, which will result in better operating efficiency, better marketing and the more commercial use of property assets. Privatisation will, therefore, accelerate the Underground's progress towards self-sufficiency and help to unlock the value of the undertaking, thereby generating the receipts to attack the backlog.

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): Having had a direct responsibility for London Underground for nearly five years, may I place on record my warm appreciation of the work of the management of the Underground, who have done a huge amount to increase the efficiency of the system? I assure my right hon. Friend that they are the first to point out that, even with those efforts, it has not been enough. There is a backlog, despite levels of Government investment of the order of six or seven times those under Labour.

If my right hon. Friend accepts that fare payers cannot be asked for limitless additional revenue and that taxpayers are already paying a record amount, does he agree that it would appear utterly perverse for purely ideological reasons to deny the Underground the substantial billions of extra investment that a privatisation could unlock? Is it not clear that the position in which the Labour party has put itself is laughable and perverse, and that the only losers by the adoption of such a policy would be the people of London, who will see through the sterility of Labour's argument?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The dogma comes entirely from Opposition Members. I draw their attention to a leader in *The Independent* on 29 January 1997, headed "Privatisation should be pragmatic, not dogmatic". That leader advocates the privatisation of London Underground.

My hon. Friend is right to pay tribute to the work of Peter Ford and his team, which I recognised in my statement, as I do now. I hope that, depending on which structure we choose, there will be opportunities for employee investment in a new structure. My hon. Friend again reminds the House to mind the gap—the gap between what we have put on the table for London Underground and what the Opposition have failed to provide to match it.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Can the Minister explain the gap between his predecessor's promise to the House of Commons in 1984, when the Conservative Government passed legislation to take London Transport out of the hands of the Greater London council, that that was being done to tackle the gap in investment and end under-investment in the tube, and what he says 13 years later—that there is still under-investment in the tube?

Does the Minister recall that, in each of the three years of the Labour administration from 1981 to 1984, when London Transport was taken over by the Government, we made proposals for a major programme of investment in the London tube, and that each year the Conservative Government vetoed them? Those proposals included the proposal to build the Jubilee line, which would have been working for the past eight years if the Conservative Government had not vetoed it. Why should Londoners believe the Conservatives now when they were lied to in 1984?

Will the Secretary of State get in touch with Sir Horace Cutler, the leader of the Tory group on the GLC in the mid-1970s, who commissioned an internal report for the Tory group on the potential for privatising the tube, and decided not to proceed with the proposal when that report pointed out that the only way in which the tube could be privatised would be to decimate off-peak services and reduce them to no more than two trains an hour?

Sir George Young: I hope that the hon. Gentleman heard the commitment that I gave about services. That deals with the scare story at the end of his remarks. Let me give some figures, not from my Government but from his Government, to contrast our commitment to investment in London Underground. Core investment last year, excluding private finance, was more than three times as high in real terms as in 1979. At today's prices, core investment in 1979 was £172 million, compared with £576 million in 1995–96. Those statistics give the true story about commitment to London Underground.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): On the history of the matter, is it not true that, when the GLC controlled London Underground, it put political placemen on the board, held board meetings that went on hour after hour, and had virtually no capital programmes? I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement. It is good for passengers, and makes economic, financial and political sense. The only people for whom it is bad are the Labour Opposition, who will have to explain to transport correspondents, political correspondents and passengers how they will achieve the levels of capital investment now promised to create a modern underground system.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. In his usual succinct way, he has put his finger on the key issues that will be of concern to Londoners between now and May.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I ask a question of fact? What figures does the Department of Transport have for the repair of all the aging Victorian tunnels—many of which are suffering deterioration—at the same time? There are those who are expert in stone who say that such structures do not last for ever, and that difficulties in tunnel maintenance will come together on a major scale. What figures are available to the Department of Transport?

Sir George Young: The principal figures available to my Department are those that have been supplied by London Underground, whose best estimate of the extent of the current backlog is £1.2 billion.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the key consideration for my constituents who use the London underground regularly is the future quality and frequency of service? My right hon. Friend will have noted that the undertakings that he has given should be backed up when the privatisations

take place. Is it not the case that any alternative must be demonstrated to have money behind it? If the Government still have their hands on the assets, private business men will not want to go near any investment programme, as they know what will happen halfway down the line when the Government pull out, as the Opposition would do if they were in power?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right. I gave guarantees on service levels. I made it clear that the private sector will be required to provide a guaranteed level of service, broadly safeguarding the existing level of provision, and that there will be an independent regulatory authority supervising the privatised underground, independent of the train operators, which will agree to changes in service levels only after carefully considering the benefits for passengers. That is a wholly new safeguard.

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): May I remind the Secretary of State that it was the Labour Government who opened Hatton Cross station, the three Heathrow stations and also the Jubilee line, which was the last major programme of underground construction in London? Which of the uneconomic services—I think I quote him correctly—does he expect to be cut under privatisation?

Sir George Young: I made no reference to any uneconomic services being cut; on the contrary, I made it clear that there would be guarantees based broadly on the current level of provision. I am interested in more provision. That is why we are investing in the Jubilee line extension—some £2 billion. That is why we are investing in the Croydon tramlink. That is why we are investing in Thameslink 2000. That is why we are building the channel tunnel rail link through Stratford into St. Pancras. That is why I welcome the Heathrow express. There has not been such a commitment to investment in the public sector transport network in London for many, many years.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): My right hon. Friend will recall that London Underground asks the Government for £700 million every year, which is the sum that it needs to produce a truly modern metro. It is obvious that his solution is the only one that will work properly. Given the financial demands of health, education and law and order, there is no way in which taxpayers could be expected to produce £700 million for the London underground. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Labour party's analysis of service needs is totally hollow? No private sector investor would produce money for collapsing embankments and tunnels when there was no cash stream.

Sir George Young: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend's first point. I hope that London Underground, London First and other organisations that advocate more Government investment in the underground will welcome the initiative that I have outlined today. I also agree with my hon. Friend's second point.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Despite what the Secretary of State said in his opening statement, is he aware that a brand new Victoria line was constructed to Brixton in my constituency under a Labour Government in the 1960s? That line, which would never have been constructed by a profit-motivated privatised institution, now forms an indispensable part of London's transport system. Is it significant that the Secretary of State's 10 points contain nothing about the construction of new underground lines and concentrate entirely on shoring up existing structures? Where will new structures for the underground come from?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Jubilee line extension is being built. It is a £2 billion investment, and will be opened next year. I mentioned a number of other major investments in public transport in London in response to the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill)—such as the Croydon tramlink, which is not far from the constituency of the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser).

At the beginning of my statement, I explained that our approach to railway privatisation proved that it was possible to construct new lines with a privatised industry. That is how the channel tunnel rail link is being built. The new lines that the hon. Gentleman and I want to see will be more likely to progress if we can move the industry into the private sector.

Sir Michael Grylls (North–West Surrey): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best hope for a first-class underground system that will benefit all Londoners lies with moving it into the private sector and away from political control? Private capital—without limit, if that is viable—would benefit everyone. It is obvious that there is nothing new about new Labour: it is still old Labour, which lives for nationalisation and opposes anything to do with the private sector.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend has summarised my views exactly, both on the right approach to the future of London Underground and on the Opposition's attitude to my policy. It is only a matter of time before they amend their views.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): There is a whiff of creative accountancy about the Secretary of State's statement which must be explained. If the travelcard is to stay the same and be interchangeable between the various companies that the Secretary of State must envisage, if the concessionary fare system is to remain, if services are to be broadly as they are today, and if prices are to be cut, where will the competition come from—unless it is based on a very cheap sale which, by its nature, must be short-lived?

Sir George Young: If we went down the franchising route, there would be an opportunity for competition among potential franchisees—as we have seen with British Rail. If we opted for privatising the organisation as a whole, there would an opportunity for bodies to bid in competition for it. If we opted for share flotation, there would be an opportunity to fix a price that maximised the value to taxpayers. There are many ways of introducing competition. I ask the hon. Gentleman: what sort of competition is there at present?

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Does my right hon. Friend recall that the GLC not only cut London Underground's services savagely in the early 1980s, but doubled the fares in a single year? We do not need any lessons on underground service provision and fares from

[Mr. Harry Greenway]

the Labour party. Its only proposal for London Underground is to do nothing. We must have some action. My constituents must have a better service: they need an escalator at Greenford station, better standards at Northolt station and improvements at Ealing Broadway station. That work will occur as a result of my hon. Friend's statement, and I support it.

Sir George Young: The largest single increase that I have been able to find took place between 1975 and 1976—an increase of some 25 per cent. in real terms. The House will remember that, when we approached the privatisation of British Telecom, there were many forecasts that telephone kiosks either would not work or would be closed. We have heard a similar propaganda campaign today. It was not true then. It is not true today.

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Will the Secretary of State give a categorical assurance that, between now and the general election, not one single penny of Government money will be spent on advisers, consultants, and all the trappings of even starting to look at the scheme? Does he agree that the voters of London should be given a choice in this matter, and that that will happen on general election day?

Sir George Young: Certainly not. I made it clear in my statement that I propose to consult a large number of organisations that have an interest in this policy. I see no reason why the potential benefits to Londoners should be delayed for a single day.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that he has announced today an enormous opportunity for London as a vibrant and successful city, and an opportunity for a much better rail service for all our constituents who use it regularly? Was not he right to say that the hysterical reaction from the Labour party spokesman is entirely in line with everything that the Labour party has said about every single privatisation, not just rail privatisation? Labour told us that British Telecom would have to close all its telephone boxes, and that British Airways would not be able to fly to regional airports. They have been wrong every time, and Londoners simply will not believe them this time.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right. The House will remember that the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), who is now the Opposition Chief Whip, said that British Airways

"will be the pantomime horse of capitalism if it is anything at all."—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1979; Vol. 974, c. 125.]

That is the sort of hysterical pronouncement that we have grown used to from Opposition Members when we propose the privatisation of something in the transport industry.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): How much money has the Secretary of State set aside for financial and technical advice? Advice on privatising British Rail cost the British taxpayer £450 million. How much will it cost to privatise London Underground? What expenditure has been cut? The Secretary of State, both in this job and in his former job, was a keen advocate of the private finance initiative. On the privatisation that he announced today, is he saying that his Government have failed to bring forward constructive private finance initiatives that would ensure proper investment in London's underground services?

Sir George Young: No expenditure has been cut to take forward the policies that I have just outlined. Any expenditure on advisers is a good investment if it secures an industry, if it drives up the quality of services, and if it improves its investment record and eliminates the investment backlog.

No Administration has taken the PFI forward with greater enthusiasm than this one. There are a number of private finance initiatives being advanced within London Underground, but as the chairman of London Underground made clear last week to the Transport Select Committee, the PFI cannot reach all the investment backlog. Some of the work cannot be completed under a PFI deal. Whatever progress is made with the PFI, we are still left with an industry in the public sector that is subject to all the public expenditure constraints of any other nationalised industry. Privatisation addresses both those problems.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Does my right hon. Friend agree that my constituents will judge his proposals by whether they work in practice: for example, by bringing forward the much-needed upgrade of Metropolitan line infrastructure; by assisting the cross-rail project to go ahead; and by ensuring that, when my constituents get to Baker street or Marylebone, the escalators work? Will he confirm that the purpose of his proposals is to allow capital investment to take place to provide the improvement in service that my constituents seek?

Sir George Young: On the latter point, the answer is, of course, yes. I hope that everybody will judge the proposals on their merits. It is not some dogmatic proposal. We have looked at London Underground. We have asked ourselves what its needs are. We have come up with a tailor-made package that addresses the problems of London Underground. That is not dogma, but common sense.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Have not the Government run down the London underground in the years leading up to this statement? The Minister's so-called commitments would not be worth the paper they are written on if the Tories got a dreaded fifth term. When the election was out of the way, the Chancellor would get his hands on the money and the Secretary of State would move on. The proposals would cost London passengers and taxpayers dearly. Have not the Tories shown by this privatisation proposal that they have given up on London commuters altogether?

Sir George Young: The people who have given up are those who have failed to produce an alternative scenario that provides the benefits to Londoners that I have outlined. We have not neglected investment in London Underground. I shall not repeat the figures, because I have already quoted them twice, but they show a dramatic increase in investment in the core network between the 1970s and 1980s and now.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): My right hon. Friend will be well aware that I have instigated more

Adjournment debates calling for increased investment in London Underground than any other hon. Member. London Underground was starved of cash when it was under the control of a strategic authority for London. May I welcome the statement, which will lead to increased investment to complement the £430 million PFI initiative for the Northern line, and the £25 million investment at the Morden and Golders Green depots? I thank my right hon. Friend for giving Londoners the assurances on concessionary fares schemes, quality of service and maximum fares for which I asked on 10 February.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend has always been a staunch advocate of London Transport, and I am delighted to have his support. He may have secured more Adjournment debates on London transport than anyone else, but I have answered more Adjournment debates than anyone else.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Is it true that last year £1,229 million of debt was written off when British Rail assets were transferred to Railtrack? Why did the Secretary of State's list of 10 points not include debt write-off? In all the other privatisations, billions of pounds of debt was written off so that the privatised companies could start work with a clean sheet of paper.

Sir George Young: London Underground has no debt.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Having travelled on the London underground all my life, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on taking this important step in privatising the service. Will he confirm that it will provide an excellent opportunity to recycle receipts into new services, such as the extension of the Northern line from Morden to Sutton? Does he agree that only with such new investment and privatisation can we pave the way for new services and provide badly needed resources, which the Labour party would deny London Underground?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend draws attention to an aspect of the announcement that has not featured much in this question and answer session. The first call on the privatisation receipts will be the backlog that needs to be tackled. After that, we anticipate a surplus, the majority of which will be put back into transport in London and outside. People will be able to bid for projects, such as the one to which my hon. Friend referred. I hope that that additional feature of privatisation will be widely welcomed.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Did I understand the Secretary of State to promise that a privatised underground will be a financial triumph, just as the channel tunnel was? Will he make it clear what he is saying about services, because he keeps using the word "broadly"? Will the level of service be guaranteed? Will it at least be at the present level?

Sir George Young: The answer is yes, broadly. We shall ensure that the private sector will be required to provide a guaranteed level of service that broadly safeguards the existing level of provision. There must be an element of flexibility, but the regulatory authority that will supervise the underground, which will be independent of the train operators, will agree to changes in service levels only after carefully considering the benefits to passengers. That safeguard does not exist now.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Given that there are, at the most, nine weeks to go until the general election and six until the election campaign, does the Secretary of State realise how irresponsible it would be to spend public money on advisers, when there is every indication that the scheme will never go ahead? Will the right hon. Gentleman think again, and—as my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) rightly suggested—let the people of London decide at the election? To use public money in the way that he intends would be totally irresponsible, and could not be justified.

Sir George Young: The people of London will, of course, decide, and I hope that their decision will be influenced by our plans for London Underground. I hope that they will contrast what I have outlined this afternoon with the complete absence of any comparable strategy from any other party. As for making progress with the policy, I see no reason to delay the progress that I want to make. I believe that it will have real benefits for Londoners, and I want to get on with it as fast as I can.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): What is London Underground's current asset value? Will it be possible to sell it at less than its asset value? Will there be a limit to the profit that can be made on the on-sale of any of the assets? Why does the Secretary of State not contemplate, as one option, retaining public ownership while allowing London Underground to borrow entirely as it would wish in the private markets? I understand that London Transport would be perfectly happy for it to do that.

Sir George Young: If we did that, it would simply score as public borrowing or public expenditure. There is no way of using creative accounting to solve the problem. As for the proceeds from this privatisation, as with other privatisations, the Government are not making an estimate of those in advance.

Mr. Gale: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise for trying to intervene earlier, but the matter that I wished to raise related to the statement.

I seek your advice in regard to the conventions of the House. Just over a week ago, the Leader of the Opposition instigated a motion of censure against my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. When the likely result of the vote became known, the Leader of the Opposition ran from the Chamber and hid behind his spin doctors in his room behind your Chair.

This afternoon, in the full glare of the television cameras and in a public performance, the Leader of the Opposition asked three questions relating to the future of London Underground; yet, when the statement was made, he saw fit to leave the Chamber and not listen to the answers.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): And Major did?

Mr. Gale: With great respect, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister knew the answers. The Leader of the Opposition clearly did not.

[Mr. Gale]

My question to you is this, Madam Speaker. Is it not a convention of the House that those who ask questions stay to listen to the answers? Whether or not the Leader of the Opposition has the courage to stay and listen to answers that he might not like, should he not have the courtesy to do so?

Madam Speaker: This is rather a political argument. The Opposition have their own shadow Ministers to ask questions of the Secretary of State.

As for convention, may I make this point? This morning, I heard the Secretary of State say on the radio that he had a statement to make to the House today, and that he would not divulge what was in it. I applauded that. He did go on a little to say what would be in it—but, if we are speaking of conventions, I have always applauded Secretaries of State who say, "Yes, I have a statement to make, but it will be made to the House of Commons first."

As for Leaders of the Opposition, I do not know where they sit on these matters. I do not know whether they want to watch the television in their room, or stay on the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Ministerial gesticulation from a sedentary position, however well intentioned, is no substitute for clear statements in *Hansard*. Will you give the Secretary of State an opportunity to say whether the £1.2 billion to which he referred covers simply tunnels, or a good deal else?

Sir George Young: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I will see whether I can obtain an estimate from London Underground of the proportion of the total backlog that relates to tunnels.

Madam Speaker: I think that it would be better to be absolutely clear, so that other hon. Members also know the answer, and to place a question on the Order Paper. I think that that would be very helpful.

BILL PRESENTED

GREAT APES (PROHIBITION OF EXPERIMENTS)

Mr. Tony Banks, supported by Mr. Elliot Morley, Mr. Gerald Bermingham, Mr. Jim Cunningham, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Tony Benn, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mr. Roger Gale, Mr. Phil Gallie, Dr. Norman A. Godman, Mr. Harry Greenway and Mr. Ken Livingstone, presented a Bill to prohibit certain experimental or scientific procedures being conducted on great apes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 115].

POLICE AND FIREMEN'S PENSIONS BILL

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 90(1) (Second reading committees),

That the Police and Firemen's Pensions Bill be referred to a Second Reading Committee.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

Question agreed to.

Local Government (Conduct of Officers)

4.28 pm

Mr. Chris Davies (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to enhance the independence and professional status of senior local government officers by providing for a statutory code of conduct requiring that their advice and actions be politically impartial, and to establish an independent tribunal with authority to investigate complaints made by the public and enforce the code as required, and related matters.

The Bill has the objective of enhancing the professional status and protecting the independence of senior local government officers. Let me tell the House why the Bill is necessary.

The work of senior local government officers is of great importance to the communities that we serve. It is the good fortune of many of us to work with officers of a very high calibre. Their role is, of course, different from that of their civil service counterparts. Chief officers do not serve council leaders as permanent secretaries serve Ministers. Instead they are the servants of the entire council: of the controlling party and of the opposition parties alike. They must also be accountable to some extent to the public for the services that they provide and administer.

Chief officers have a duty to give their professional advice impartially, openly and without bias to each and every councillor. It is up to the elected representatives then to make the political judgments, accepting or rejecting the advice as they see fit. The House has recognised that, if the independence of local government officers is not to be compromised, they must be separate and removed from party politics. The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 forbids them from serving in a political capacity on another council. Although they may be members of a political party, they may not hold posts within it.

The Local Government Management Board has published a code of conduct, but it is not statutory and need not even be accepted by a local authority, let alone enforced. Existing provisions are not sufficient to prevent the insidious subversion of officers' independence in councils that are run by one party, of whatever political persuasion, for a great length of time.

Some 70 councils have been run by just one party since their inception in 1974. Thanks to the collapse of the Conservatives in local government, they are mostly Labour-run authorities by a factor of some four to one and they include 22 metropolitan districts and London boroughs. A short distance from my home, I think on the one side of the Pennines of Manchester, Salford and Wigan and on the other of Barnsley, Wakefield and the recently notorious Doncaster.

The party in control can of course be said to command the support of the electorate, but, however good the reasons, where one party is in control for a great length of time, the checks and balances of the democratic process are greatly eroded. The will of the controlling party and the will of the council may all too easily come to be viewed as one and the same thing. There is then an ever present risk that officers will be put under pressure to subordinate their independent judgment to that of the political party in control.

At its most vile, I have seen that pressure applied by militant Labour councillors in Liverpool when they gained control in 1983. The atmosphere of a previously balanced and open council was rapidly transformed. Officers were sworn at and ridiculed in public committee meetings by their new political masters. They were physically threatened, I understand, in private. The stress placed on them was immense, and it contributed to the premature death of one at least, whom, I had known and worked with. Many others sought escape by way of early retirement.

That was an extreme example. Much more common is the subtle pressure placed on senior officers because their careers depend on the good will of the politicians who influence the appointments committees, or the chief executive, who may have misplaced loyalties. How can impartial professional judgment be given if it has been privately indicated that an impartial view is not what is required?

A friendly relationship between councillors and officers is of course fine, but each needs to know their role and their place. That is why the growth of what might be termed "a culture of familiarity" at the highest levels can be invidious. A council leader with firm control over the majority group works alongside a chief executive for, say, 20 years. Over the years, they help each other out of scrapes. The one supports the other to fend off criticism. It is not a conspiracy, just human nature, but the divisions between politician and officer are gradually bridged in ways that are in the interests neither of democracy nor of the public good.

The Audit Commission, for example, may publish performance indicators that might prove embarrassing to the administration. The chief executive decides not to place them on the committee agenda for consideration by councillors. The council leader backs him up. It is a matter of, "You scratch my back; I'll scratch yours." Public debate is avoided. Embarrassment is saved all round. At the worst, there is a concentration of power, which is exercised arrogantly and influences officers at every level of the structure. They know that they must bite their tongues and blow no whistles.

The scandals in Doncaster and Westminster exposed by the district auditor occurred only because, at some point, senior officers turned a blind eye to the unacceptable behaviour of some councillors or allowed them to pursue policies of dubious legality. I do not believe that that could have happened if officers had not been expected to toe the leadership's line or risk damage to their careers by speaking out.

I regard the doctoring of officers' reports as particularly malign. When proposals for new legislation are introduced in the House, hon. Members know that many of them have been drafted by civil servants. The Minister who presents the legislation, however, will rightly defend it as his own. The practice can be quite different in local government. A chief officer's report and recommendation to a council committee supposedly represent his or her independent professional opinion, and the controlling party often will make the point that the council pays a great deal of money to employ the person for that advice. In practice, however, the so-called "independent" report may have been politically influenced before it reaches the council, leaving the decision-making process tainted and corrupted.

In such cases, the officer's professional judgment reflects nothing more than the wishes of the controlling party or of its leadership. It is a dishonest game of backroom political manipulation—which councillors detached from the leadership may suspect but can rarely prove. Opposition councillors are left complaining of political bias, but they are powerless to act. The public lose confidence in democracy and feel that there is no chance to redress their complaints. To whom could they appeal? The council's monitoring officer is perhaps the chief executive or someone who answers to him. Will he investigate complaints about himself? A behind-the-scenes fix may not necessarily be maladministration, which would rule out the intervention of the ombudsman. Judicial review is possible, but, in most cases, it is too expensive and cumbersome.

I believe that the vast majority of local government officers profoundly resent being dragged into the political process and being told privately—by a politician or a chief executive with misplaced loyalties—what they must say and write when reporting to the council.

My Bill would provide good officers with a cloak of protection. It would establish a strong and legally binding code that places on officers a duty to serve the council as a whole and to exercise their judgment free from partisan influence. It would also forbid discrimination in any aspect of their employment on partisan grounds.

The code would allow an officer to remind councillors or even a chief executive that it is against the law to require officers to protect the interests of one particular group of councillors, or for them to be influenced by anything other than their own professional judgment when preparing reports for the council. The Bill would also provide the code of conduct with some real teeth. It would establish a tribunal with staff who would have the power to investigate complaints made by officers, councillors or members of the public. The tribunal could publish reports requiring that the council demonstrates that necessary disciplinary action has been taken or recommending the disqualification of councillors identified as having put political pressure on an officer.

In practice, I hope and believe that the work of such a tribunal would be minimal. The mere fact of its establishment and the creation of a new code would help to change the nature of local government and allow a breath of fresh air to penetrate some of its more odorous recesses. Decisions affecting local communities should be taken openly and publicly by elected representatives of the community in council chambers and in committee rooms, not in back-room meetings held discreetly in private offices in the civic centre or town hall.

The measures proposed in my Bill would allow local government officers to take pride not only in their professionalism but in their independence. The measures will raise the standard of informed debate on important issues affecting local communities, and improve the quality of decision taking. By more clearly defining the space between the roles—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Chris Davies, Mr. David Rendel, Mr. Don Foster, Mr. Peter Thurnham, Mr. David Chidgey, Mr. David Alton, Ms Liz Lynne and Mr. Simon Hughes.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (CONDUCT OF OFFICERS)

Mr. Chris Davies accordingly presented a Bill to enhance the independence and professional status of senior local government officers by providing for a statutory code of conduct requiring that their advice and actions be politically impartial, and to establish an independent tribunal with authority to investigate complaints made by the public and enforce the code as required, and related matters: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 May, and to be printed [Bill 116].

Orders of the Day

Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill *[Lords]*

[Relevant documents: Fourth report from the Social Security Committee of Session 1994–95 (HC 196) on compensation recovery and the Government's response thereto (Cm 2997.]

Order for Second Reading read.

4.39 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The purpose of the Bill is to ensure that victims get proper compensation, those responsible for causing injury pay that compensation and the taxpayer neither subsidises the negligence of others nor doubly compensates victims. The full package of reforms will save the taxpayer an extra £50 million a year.

The Bill deals with a less well-known part of the social security system. Nevertheless, it is an important reform because it brings the process of benefit recovery into line with a long-standing and widely agreed principle.

People suffering injury, accident or disease may sometimes receive compensation from a third party, such as an insurer. They may also, independently of that, receive social security benefits to meet their needs for lost income, or to meet extra care needs. So they could be entitled to two lots of money for the same needs. Benefit recovery prevents that, by recouping benefits paid from public funds. The policy is founded on the principle that an individual should not receive double provision to meet the same need.

Although that long-standing common law principle pre-dates the modern welfare state, Sir William Beveridge articulated it clearly in his historic report, "Social Insurance and Allied Services", published in 1942:

> "An injured person should not have the same need met twice over. He should get benefit at once without prejudice to any alternative remedy, but if the remedy proves in fact to be available he should not in the end get more from two sources together than he would have got from one alone."

From 1948, double compensation was prevented by recovering benefits from compensation, but compensation recovery was an inconsistent business. Compensation was reduced to recover benefits already paid, but the amount deducted differed from benefit to benefit. For some benefits, 50 per cent. was deductible. For others, the full amount paid was brought to account. Compensation could be reduced to reflect the payment of certain benefits for up to five years from the date of the incident. For other benefits, there was no time limit. That inconsistent approach disadvantaged some accident victims.

A key problem with the original rules was that the compensator kept the reduction on account of benefits paid. The taxpayer lost by subsidising the negligence of the person responsible for the accident, injury or disease. In a report produced in 1986, the National Audit Office concluded that it was wrong for public funds to be used to subsidise negligence.

The NAO recommended that the amounts deducted from compensation should be recovered for the taxpayer. Subsequently, the Public Accounts Committee urged the

Government to set up such a scheme. The Government commissioned a review of the relationship between compensation and benefit payments. Following the review, we decided to act.

In 1990, the Government shifted the advantage of recovery from the insurer to the taxpayer. That is the scheme we have now. The compensator deducts from the settlement an amount equal to the benefits that have been paid. He sends that amount to my Department and pays the balance to the victim. If the compensation is £2,500 or less, benefits are not recovered. It is straightforward and it keeps bureaucracy to a minimum. Compared with the previous system, it is also good value for money, and saved the taxpayer more than £130 million last year.

The Select Committee on Social Security played a part in focusing attention on the current scheme, and on ways by which it might be improved. At the beginning of 1995, the Select Committee decided to

"inquire into the policy and practice of the compensation recovery unit, and the legislation on which it is based".

It took evidence from my Department and from a range of other interested parties and reported in July 1995. I pay tribute to the Select Committee and its Chairman, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is in his place.

In its unanimous report, the Select Committee reached conclusions about the scheme that are of crucial importance. It stated:

"it was right for the Government to shift the advantage of recovery to the taxpayer who lost out to the insurer under the pre-1990 scheme."

It added:

"the taxpayer should not be in the business of paying benefit for compensating individuals who have suffered injury or disease for which the courts would hold someone else responsible".

The Government welcomed those conclusions, as they confirmed that we were right to introduce a scheme which has the protection of the taxpayer as one of its primary objectives.

The scheme also has two unintended consequences. The first is that some victims do not get to keep all or indeed any of the compensation intended for their pain and suffering. It arises because compensators pay for proven loss, whereas the state pays for needs. Compensators reduce the amount of compensation that they pay by the total benefit already paid, regardless of what the compensation is for. So the compensation a victim receives for pain and suffering may in some cases be eroded by the recovery of benefits paid for need. A typical scenario would involve someone who is already out of work, perhaps through redundancy, before the onset of a disease caused by his former employment.

While the person is out of work, his income needs are met by state benefits. After a time, a compensation settlement from the former employer is agreed. It might be £15,000, intended to cover his pain and suffering. There would be no compensation for loss of earnings, because the victim was already unemployed, even though the illness would have made continued unemployment likely. The amount paid out in state benefits might have built up to £10,000, so £10,000 of benefit would have to be paid back to the state. The victim would be left with only £5,000—a fraction of the amount intended to cover his pain and suffering. To any reasonable person, that must seem unfair. The Government agree with the observation in the Social Security Committee's report on benefit recovery:

"We cannot accept that the general taxpayer should be reimbursed out of damages awarded for an individual's pain and suffering."

The other unintended consequence concerns the operation of the small payments limit of £2,500. For compensation payments below that limit, benefits are not currently recovered. The intention of the limit is a sensible one: it is to avoid the disproportionate administrative costs of recovering small amounts of benefit from large numbers of small claims. However it also unintentionally creates a loophole, providing incentives for insurers and victims to agree compensation at or below the small payments limit.

One effect is that both the victim and the insurer may gain at the expense of the taxpayer. I can best demonstrate that if hon. Members allow me to lead them through a simple example. Let us suppose that a victim has received £3,000 in state benefits as a consequence of an accident at work. If the compensation agreed were £5,000, the insurer would pay £3,000 to the Department of Social Security and £2,000 to the victim. It would cost the compensator a total of £5,000. If instead the parties agree to compensation of only £2,500, however, the Department gets nothing and the victim gets the full £2,500. So the victim gets £500 more while it costs the compensator £2,500 less than if the settlement had been twice that sum.

Another effect is that the insurer may gain at the expense of both the taxpayer and the victim. A disproportionate number of compensation settlements seem to be pitched at or around the small payments limit of £2,500. That suggests that many victims settle for compensation at less than the true value. We cannot let either of those circumstances continue. The Select Committee concluded that

"it was right for the Government to shift the advantage of recovery to the taxpayer who lost out to the insurer under the pre-1990 scheme."

Furthermore, the Select Committee suggested that the Government should recover 100 per cent. of benefits in every claim. To recover all benefits means removing the small payments limit.

The Government published our formal response to the Select Committee report on 2 October 1995. As part of that response, I launched an extensive consultation exercise on the implications of reform along the lines proposed by the Select Committee, which was completed in November 1995. The compliance cost assessment of the Select Committee's proposals was published on 14 February 1996. A further consultation exercise to assess the implications of that assessment followed. The closing date for responses was in April 1996.

All the key interested parties, including insurers, victims' representatives and the Trades Union Congress, were involved. A variety of organisations and individuals responded to the consultation exercise, including those who are now taking a keen interest in the Bill's progress. I am grateful for the constructive approach taken by respondents, particularly the Association of British

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

Insurers, the Law Society, the TUC, the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers, and Clydeside Action on Asbestos.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Hear, hear.

Mr. Lilley: I do not often get that sort of response from the Opposition Benches, but I welcome it. I had a helpful meeting with John Monks of the TUC. I hope that he, too, found it fruitful.

The consultation revealed a wide consensus for the reform of the scheme, in particular the protection of damages for pain and suffering, although there were differences on the details of how that could best be achieved.

Our proposals offer a full and workable solution. They strike a balance between the views of practitioners and the protection of taxpayers. They place liability on the compensator to repay 100 per cent. of the benefits paid to an injured person in respect of accident, injury or disease. They allow the compensator to reduce compensation payments pound for pound only in respect of corresponding benefits repaid to the Department. That will enable victims of accident, injury or disease to receive full compensation for pain or suffering. Those changes are in the Bill.

I also propose to remove the small payments limit, which is set in regulations as part of the current scheme. However, I intend to retain the power to set a limit in case it should be needed in future. Other measures in the Bill will simplify the appeals system, while still protecting the rights of parties to settlements to challenge benefit recovery decisions.

The anticipated cost to insurers of implementing the new arrangements will be marginal. This area of the Department's work is specialised, and is set against the background of the insurance industry in which premiums for insurance against the sectors concerned exceed £8 billion a year. That is why we commissioned independent consultants to produce a compliance cost assessment. Fifteen major insurers were closely involved, and I should like to place on record our gratitude for their support and for the valuable assistance that they provided.

The cost of operating the new arrangements is likely to be between only £3 million and £7 million a year. The compliance cost assessment estimated that insurers would face increased claims costing between £52 million and £72 million in each year following reform. If passed on to policyholders, the increase in costs is likely to produce only moderate increases in premium rates. The assessment concluded that employers' liability insurance premiums could rise by around 5 per cent. and public liability premiums by around 3 per cent. Motor insurance premiums are expected to rise by no more than 0.5 per cent. We believe that such a rise in premiums will be seen as acceptable, given the protection that the Bill offers to victims and to the taxpayer.

The change that we are making is relatively straightforward, but the Bill may appear long and somewhat complicated. Rather than making piecemeal amendments to the existing statute, the parliamentary draftsman has restated the relevant part of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 in its entirety. That will make it easier to see the proposed new scheme in the round without constantly having to refer back to a previous Act. Furthermore, if enacted in this form, it should prove easier for practitioners to absorb the changes that we are making. It should also help the scheme to run smoothly in the years following the reform.

Naturally, the Bill contains the necessary amendments to effect an important shift in responsibility for the repayment of benefit, but we have thought it right to disturb as little of the detail of the present scheme as possible. I believe that there is widespread consensus that it works well, and we do not want to put that at risk.

Subject to parliamentary approval, reform of the scheme will take effect from October 1997. Insurers will by then have had a year to prepare. The reforms will apply to cases settled from the date of implementation, including those in the pipe line. That is fair to accident victims. Otherwise, two accident victims in similar circumstances could receive different compensation on the same day simply because their claims were not initiated at the same time.

The Bill will achieve three important objectives. First, it will be fair to victims, allowing them to keep all compensation for pain and suffering. Secondly, it will maintain the principle that individuals do not receive two lots of money to meet the same need. Thirdly, it will be fair to the taxpayer. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.54 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): The Bill was introduced in another place and was the subject of thorough discussion there for more than seven hours. I pay tribute to our noble Friends for their effort in scrutinising the Bill. Important issues were raised and questions answered, so I do not need to go through them again. I shall merely point out that the matters considered included the relevant period for the recovery of benefit, issues of certificates of recoverable benefit, heads of compensation and appeal.

We support the Bill and look forward to seeing it on the statute book. It involves issues of principle and practicalities. If someone is injured and cannot work, the social security system must protect that person, but it is also right that those who are negligent should pay compensation. The state should not be required to pay instead of, or indemnify, an individual or organisation that, through negligence, injures another.

The triangle of the taxpayer, the victim of negligence and the perpetrator of the negligence—or their insurance company—has presented us with problems. The system in operation since 1989 has been confusing and inconsistent, has been unfair to individuals and has discouraged them from making claims. The problem arises when, as a result of an injury, the social security system supports the victim—as is right—but then, sometimes many years later, the victim obtains a sum in compensation from the person who was negligent.

The compensation, or a large part of it, will already have been paid out in social security benefits, so much of the money is owed to the social security system, not the individual. The current system claws back benefits from the total amount of compensation above the limit of £2,500—not only the money awarded for loss of earnings, but that awarded for pain and suffering. The whole of a

compensation payment can be clawed back, and individuals can feel that they have taken on a case for nothing. The Social Security Select Committee, to which I also pay tribute, pointed out that that is revolting to any sense of justice. It is a disincentive to claiming—if the victims end up with nothing, why should they bother to sue?

We should remember that taking legal action is quite an undertaking: it might involve many meetings with lawyers; it might take many years; it might mean being subjected to an allegation of contributory negligence; it might involve having to give evidence in court and having that evidence criticised and challenged; and, without legal aid or the backing of a trade union, it might cost a great deal in legal fees. Many victims of negligence would rather stay away from the whole business, particularly if they stand to gain little from it. However, if they do not sue, the state gets no money back and the perpetrator of the negligence gets off scot free.

It is in the state's interest that the individual should sue. By allowing the individual to keep the compensation for pain and suffering, the Bill goes some way towards ensuring that the victim has an incentive to sue, because that person will keep some of the money won in damages.

That is right in principle. As the Secretary of State said, of course benefits do not compensate for pain and suffering and therefore any sum awarded in compensation for pain and suffering should rightly belong to the individual who has suffered and should not be clawed back by social security.

A wider issue is the human and monetary price of accidents. It is unacceptable that, as we head towards the end of the 20th century, when we know so much about what causes injury and ill health and how to avoid it, accidents and ill health caused by work cost between £11 billion and £16 billion a year, according to the Health and Safety Executive. A number of my hon. Friends will raise issues concerning the shameful neglect of health and safety at work. It is unacceptable that there should be such high tolls of accidents at work and of personal injuries in road traffic accidents; the Department of Transport estimates that road accidents involving personal injury cost £9.5 billion a year.

On behalf of the taxpayer, the Department of Social Security claws back part of the bill for accidents. Even taking into account the £130 million clawed back in compensation for those admitting to or being found guilty of negligence, however, the Department still pays out millions of pounds to maintain those who have lost their income or suffered permanent disability, mostly through injury at work or on the roads.

Prevention is better than compensation. What is needed and is long overdue is a cross-departmental approach to accident prevention. Such issues are all profoundly affected by Government policy. If the Government take insufficient action to cut accidents at work or to make cars and roads safer, the individual suffers and the taxpayer picks up the Bill—yet many such accidents are preventable. It is in the interests of taxpayers and the Department of Social Security, as well as the individual concerned, to challenge other Departments to reach for yet higher safety standards and not simply talk about apportioning the bill for the cost of the accidents.

The Secretary of State should be taking action to ensure that people claim wherever there is good cause of action. Unlike cases of medical negligence, where there is a very low success rate and it is very difficult to predict which cases are likely to be successful, cases of traffic and work accidents are often very clear. According to the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers, more than 90 per cent of such cases, where there has been advice that there is a good cause of action, succeed.

How can the Secretary of State encourage justified claims? As I have said, it is in the interests of the individual and the taxpayer—and it penalises those who have been negligent—that he should do so. I should like to ask some questions to which the Under-Secretary could respond in his winding-up speech.

Has the Secretary of State considered whether he could do more to provide information about making a claim for personal injury? What information do benefit offices have and what information do they give people about the possibility of claiming for personal injury? Has the Secretary of State considered ensuring that information on claiming is given to all those who suffer injury at work or in traffic accidents? Has he considered whether such information could be available in general practitioners' surgeries and hospitals, where it could be picked up by a relative?

Only one in three victims of accidents make a claim for compensation. Although, clearly, not all accidents are a result of negligence, it is clear that many more than one in three are the result of it. Clearly, good cases are being dropped because the individual feels that there is no incentive to sue. In fact, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) wrote to the Secretary of State on 20 February about a constituent of his who has a very good case but is not bothering to sue because it is not felt to be worth while. A problem has clearly been identified. Encouraging claims contributes to public policy objectives in two ways: it holds to account and penalises those who have been negligent, and therefore acts as a deterrent; and it recoups money on behalf of the taxpayer.

As well as considering giving more information to claimants, have the Government ever considered piloting a system—I hope that, if he is bothering to listen, the Under-Secretary will respond on this point—in which legal aid rules have additional flexibility for people claiming where the DSS will be the ultimate beneficiary? The difficulty lies where there is a good claim and the DSS has a big interest in it being made but the person concerned is not eligible for legal aid.

As I have said, although many claims have a good chance of success, they are not proceeded with because the plaintiff does not qualify for legal aid or, in the case of injury at work, have the legal backing of a trade union, and is not prepared to use his or her own money for a case where he or she sees little benefit. In its compliance cost assessment, Price Waterhouse estimated that every 1 per cent. increase in successful claims for personal injury—bearing it in mind that there is a 90 per cent. success rate—would save £21 million for the DSS in recoverable benefits.

Although the measures in the Bill go some way towards solving the problem, how can further progress be made? How do we deal with a situation in which the one who stands to gain—the DSS—has no locus standi as the plaintiff, and the person with locus standi as the plaintiff does not stand to gain? The pain and suffering exemption goes only some way towards dealing with that problem.

[Ms Harriet Harman]

There is a strong argument for the DSS looking for further action to ensure that claims that are likely to be successful are pursued.

Has the Secretary of State considered, for example, that, with the agreement of the plaintiff, the DSS could step into the plaintiff's shoes? Has he considered that, in some cases, the DSS could indemnify individuals against costs? Those proposals would bear looking at. They would have to be evaluated, and might even need to be piloted, but cases are clearly being dropped and the exemption for pain and suffering goes only part of the way towards solving the problem.

In certain cases, the DSS could provide funding to support legal action; it could have its own fund to receive payments of compensation to provide further support for legal action. Those are only proposals, but they should be looked at, since we still have not found our way out of the triangle of different interests.

By abolishing the £2,500 limit and allowing victims to keep compensation for pain and suffering, the Bill makes a vast improvement. It brings greater fairness to individuals and the taxpayer—but it is only a start. Hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money could be saved by more imaginative and purposeful cross-departmental work to prevent accidents at work and on the road and by supporting those involved in accidents and encouraging them to pursue justified personal injury claims.

5.7 pm

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): Coming from a background of industry, especially the mining industry, as you do, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I spent 26 years underground—I do not consider people concerned with the Bill to be numbers. They are colleagues, friends, and even relations. Many have passed away. When such people come to my surgeries, the disgust and anger expressed—especially by friends and loved ones—about the clawback makes me very angry, too.

The effects of an industrial disease or injury, especially of pneumoconiosis, asbestosis and mesothelioma, on the victim and his family are astronomical. The loss of income as a result of injury in employment immediately affects not only the person but his family. The disabling effect on the individual is traumatic. Even an individual's character alters—sometimes not for the better—because he or she can no longer attend to many of the things that used to be done normally, such as pouring a cup of tea or going to the toilet.

Mental anxiety and guilt are felt when the victims blame themselves for their predicament. We cannot compensate those people or their families for the sadness caused. It is said that to give one's life for one's friend is the greatest sacrifice. To give one's life and health for industry is, in my opinion, never compensated for properly and never can be. However, as a society, we must make life tolerable for victims and compensate them financially at least.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) mentioned the difficulty of claiming compensation. An ill person faces the ordeal of clinical examinations and cross-examination in court—in other words, humiliation from start to finish. If, because of delays, all the settlement is recovered by the Government, why bother? People ask me why they should go through the traumatic experience of appearing in court and being criticised and humiliated. As the Secretary of State admitted, if the settlement does not exceed the clawback amount, the taxpayer has to foot the bill, and the firm that is liable can walk away scot free. The limit of £2,500 has caused people to give up on their genuine claims, because they fear losing even that pittance. It is a pittance in comparison with a life.

There are exemptions to the £2,500 limit. The National Coal Board—later British Coal—had a pneumoconiosis scheme, which was exempt. The hearing loss agreement, the criminal justice compensation scheme and many others do not have the compensation awarded clawed back. Exemption has been sought for asbestos cases, especially mesothelioma. If the Bill comes into force with immediate effect, and the retrospectivity provisions are retained, asbestos cases may be more proactively pursued by the persons responsible for causing the diseases and their insurers, but that will not help mesothelioma sufferers.

Mesothelioma is a category of asbestos damage that is readily diagnosed and cannot be confused with other conditions. The mean time of survival is 44 weeks from the date of diagnosis, and earlier diagnosis is extremely difficult. It therefore has a clearly defined period from diagnosis to death. It is a virulent form of asbestos disease that causes the person to become grossly disabled and bedridden in a short time. It is also notoriously painful, needing substantial administration of pain-killing drugs, including morphine. Against that background, cases have to be progressed with all the difficulties referred to in the Social Security Committee report, in paragraph 54 and the quotation from the Minister.

The Government have recognised the urgency of cases of mesothelioma by dispensing with the period of 90 days for the award of industrial disablement benefit. They have therefore recognised the particular difficulties of the disease and the need for exemption. If the Government allow those responsible for such injuries to seek set-off under clause 8 or to apply for review and appeals—all of which cannot be determined within the mean time of survival—they will cause delays in progressing such cases.

Any obstacle to progressing the cases should be removed. Given the limited survival time, in some cases benefit is awarded only shortly before death, and the Government would be in the absurd and harsh situation of giving benefit and taking it away at the same time or shortly afterwards. The benefit would invariably be taken away from the widow or widower and the deceased's estate. Although the benefit might be substantial for the mesothelioma sufferer or his estate, the cost to the taxpayer would be negligible.

I hope that the provisions on retrospection will be taken into account. The Bill fails to address an absurdity, in clause 3, that occurs in the provisions on appeals, but the problem may be dealt with through regulation. As matters stand at present, judgment may be made in favour of the injured person. If an appeal is not made on the judgment, the consequent payment is subject to compensation recovery unit recoupment. If an appeal is made, additional CRU benefit accumulates after the judgment. Appeals can also take some time—in many cases, as long as, if not longer than, the original action. I ask that benefit be clawed back only for the period up to the original judgment.

The Bill will redress in part the gross injustice of the present regulations that recoup money from victims' damages, but some principles and issues will not be satisfactorily resolved by it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham said, the Bill is a beginning, not the end, in solving the problem.

5.16 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): The Bill also has my full support: it is modest, but much needed, and it will right some serious injustices; it will also save the taxpayer money. I hope that it receives Royal Assent before the general election, because it is important to get it on the statute book. It will stop state benefit being clawed back from persons who have been injured. If people sue their employers successfully, and the compensation awarded to them is above the £2,500 limit, all the state benefits they receive after the injury is clawed back. That cruel system was introduced by the compensation recovery scheme in 1990. It was bad for victims, bad for health and safety standards and bad for the Treasury and the taxpayer.

The scheme was bad for accident victims because it gave insurers an incentive to drag out cases and put pressure on victims to settle early and for less money. The Secretary of State mentioned the Trades Union Congress, which has estimated that one in 10 compensation claims started in 1989 have still not been settled. Often, the accident victims have settled for less than £2,500 because any excess would be clawed back.

The scheme was bad for health and safety, because it reduced the level of compensation. Most employers ensure that they practise good safety regulations, but some unscrupulous employers might have felt that they did not need to maintain a safe working environment because insurers no longer had to pay out large sums.

The scheme was bad for the Treasury and the taxpayer, because victims often settled for sums below the £2,500 limit and the Treasury got nothing back. Unison gave me an example. In 1990, 40 claims were settled for £2,500; in 1993, 270 were. We can see the changes that the compensation recovery unit brought about. There was no increase in the overall number of cases, so we cannot use that as a reason for the higher figure.

The GMB said that 12 of the 487 cases in 1990 were settled for less than £2,500, but that, in 1994, 56 cases out of 496 were settled for that sum. That is a fourfold increase. A similar increase has been mentioned by other unions, and I know that unions and personal injury solicitors have written in support of the Bill to hon. Members from all parties.

The evidence has been ignored for too long. On 20 March 1995, in answer to a parliamentary question about the number of claims made for less than £2,500 since 1990, I was told that the information was not readily available. If the Government had monitored claims since the introduction of the compensation recovery unit, the injustice would have been sorted out far sooner. It is interesting to note that they did not do so, and that the figures were not available to me or to other hon. Members.

The Bill will address the issue at long last. I do not claim, any more than other hon. Members do, that the Bill is perfect. Earl Russell, my colleague in another place, pressed for amendments, and various organisations want minor changes. None the less, those organisations are keen for the Bill to become law.

I hope that, in Committee, we shall be able to make improvements, especially by way of amendments to clause 8, so that the compensator will have to provide a breakdown of the gross compensation under the three categories in schedule 2. It would then be easier for victims to assess the offer before them.

Although I want improvements, I welcome the Bill, and I believe that it must become law.

5.21 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I must tell the Secretary of State that it was I who cheered him earlier when he rightly and properly complimented members of Clydeside Action on Asbestos on their sustained campaign on behalf of asbestosis sufferers throughout the United Kingdom, not just those who live near the Clyde.

There is a question that I should like to ask the Under-Secretary of State who is to wind up. It was prompted by a telephone call that I received this morning from the representative of a voluntary association in Northern Ireland. The Minister will see from his copy of the Bill that the fourth paragraph of the explanatory and financial memorandum says:

"The Bill extends to Great Britain. Corresponding provision may be made for Northern Ireland by Order in Council."

I always like to see the word "shall" rather than the word "may" in such cases. I should be grateful if the Minister would confirm that, when the Bill becomes law, it will be followed immediately by such an Order in Council, for the benefit of all the sufferers in Northern Ireland. The Minister is smiling, but I am sure that he agrees that that is important.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): I was smiling only because I have the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question. It is yes.

Dr. Godman: I am delighted to hear that. I am sure that the voluntary organisations and, much more important the sufferers and claimants, in Northern Ireland will be pleased with the Minister's emphatic assurance.

It is not for me to ask the Minister lots of questions now, because I hope to be lucky enough to be on the Standing Committee, but may I ask him one more? I have received several complaints about the time that it takes for an appeal against a decision of the compensation recovery unit to be heard. If the Minister cannot respond to those complaints now, will he do so later in writing?

I believe that an increasing number of appeals have been upheld over the past two years; it is doubly unfortunate if a person making an appeal has to wait an unconscionably long time before it is even heard, let alone decided.

Having served my time in a shipyard as a shipwright, I, like my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke), have seen many serious injuries. As one who is closely associated with the fishing industry, I have also come across numerous fatalities in that industry, both when vessels are at sea and when they are tied up at the quay.

[Dr. Godman]

I welcome the Bill. It is an important measure—although the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State will not be surprised to hear that in my view it does not go far enough. The Secretary of State would be astonished if I were more complimentary than I already have been. I have frequently engaged him in debates on issues concerning constituents and others in the unfortunate position of having to seek social security incomes of some kind from the state. If nothing else, the right hon. Gentleman usually listens courteously—although he usually gives me an equally courteous dismissal.

I have always thought that the CRU was engaged in a squalid exercise, but the record of the insurance companies is far more despicable than that of Ministers and officials in the Department of Social Security. Ministers have, at least partially, seen the error of their ways, but insurance companies seem much more concerned with providing benefits for their boards of directors than with dealing expeditiously with the legitimate claims brought by people, many of whom have been severely injured or are terminally ill.

I am sure that I speak for every hon. Member when I say that I have seen such people in my surgeries—terminally ill people with asbestosis, for example. I do not say that that disease is peculiar to the shipbuilding and construction industries, but people in those industries who have given loyal, skilled and hard-working service to their employers have often been made to suffer dreadfully because of those employers' sheer negligence and indifference.

The insurance companies have a poor record in that regard. Their conduct when dealing with such cases is always characterised by prevarication and procrastination. It is disgraceful that cases involving people who are seriously injured or who suffer from a terminal illness take so long to settle.

What is the average length of a case involving such a person—three years, four years, five years? I have dealt with some cases recently, involving people making claims against the hospital board, and been told that the average is five years. Is it the same for asbestosis sufferers and people who have been injured because of the negligence of their employers?

I wish to record my grateful appreciation of the efforts of the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians, the GMB, the Transport and General Workers Union and, last but not least, those of the members of Clydeside Action on Asbestos, including some of our Scottish colleagues who are in the Chamber today. The Scottish Trades Union Congress and the TUC have also played an important role.

On behalf of my constituents and others in Scotland who have suffered the problems that we are discussing, I wish to express thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), the Chairman of the Select Committee. My hon. Friend had to attend a meeting at 5 o'clock, so he offers his apologies for his unavoidable absence from the debate.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) for organising a remarkable meeting with the Chairman of the Select Committee and other interested Members of Parliament that enabled some seriously ill members of Clydeside Action on Asbestos to present their cases to us. I am sure that that had an effect on those members of the Select Committee who attended the meeting.

I received a letter and a briefing from Margaret Sharkey of UCATT. The briefing said:

"Last year UCATT dealt with nearly 900 cases of industrial injury or disease winning over £5 million in damages for UCATT members with average settlements of £6,015. But at least half a million pounds was clawed back by the Compensation Recovery Unit."

It went on to say:

"Compensation is paid by employers/insurers because they have broken the law".

That is an emphatic statement with which I have a great deal of sympathy.

The briefing continued:

"if the government is unhappy about the price of ill health and injury on our building sites they should settle the score with those who are responsible by tougher enforcement of health and safety regulations, stricter penalties for those who break them and clawback of DSS benefits, if needed, from the employers/insurers on top of the settlement to the victim."

My reason for saying that I have a great deal of sympathy with that emphatic statement is that I have seen other accidents in the industries that I know well, largely—not always—brought about by the negligence of employers who demand that workers work excessive hours. Making workers do shifts of 10, 12 or more hours increases the incidence of accidents.

The briefing continued:

"The scale of death, injury and ill-health in the industry is a disgrace. Construction is Britain's most dangerous industry. There were 80 building workers and 3 members of the public killed on sites in 1995/96 and 88 in 1994/95. The death and major injury rate is three times higher than the average for other industries. Studies show most of these deaths are caused by poor management and failure to take basic precautions."

To that I would add the lack of inspection by accredited inspectors. I have seen strange requests carried out by workers at the behest of their foremen and supervisors. They have had to engage in risky operations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie quoted from the Clydeside Action on Asbestos briefing. I want to reserve a couple of quotations for the Standing Committee, but I should like the Minister to respond to the group's demand on the need to avoid the delay spelled out by the Secretary of State.

Members of Clydeside Action on Asbestos said:

"We are told that the reason for the delay between the Act being passed in April 1997 but only coming into force in October 1997 is to allow the CRU to prepare itself for the new system. We do not see why the CRU cannot prepare itself well before then. The Act has a broad party support, any amendments to the Act are unlikely to lead to substantial amendment and the CRU can therefore tool up quite adequately for the coming into force of this Act.

If the Act was to come into force in April 1997 there would be certainty for plaintiffs and pursuers and it would prevent administrative delays which could be occasioned by the CRU trying to tool up for a new system while operating the present system."

I consider that a legitimate complaint; matters could be expedited along the lines suggested.

The Bill is a worthwhile measure: it does not go far enough, but it will bring some relief to many of my constituents who at this very moment are pursuing claims against negligent and careless employers. If those employers were to have a son or daughter injured because

of their negligence, that might bring home to them the scale of neglect and negligence on some of our building sites and shipyards and elsewhere.

Shipyards today have a much better record than hitherto, but there are still too many accidents in workplaces throughout the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) is absolutely right to say that much more needs to be done, but at least those who are injured will derive some benefit from this legislation.

5.35 pm

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): It is an absolute disgrace that a Bill of such substance and importance is given only two and a half hours to be debated in the Chamber. Think of the time that has passed: asbestosis and mesothelioma go back as far as 1889.

It is also important to note that previous Governments have done nothing about a disease that is one of the biggest killers. Millions of pounds have been spent on prevention and training about AIDS and other diseases that are a much lower priority, but very little has been spent in the past seven years on mesothelioma: only £447,000.

The disease affects not only bricklayers and plumbers, but members of the public. I remember, when I was a plumber, going into King's Park school where pipe coverers were stripping all the pipes and taking off all the asbestos. The place was polluted with dust. If a small speck of that dust gets into people's lungs, they are finished.

We are talking about ring-fencing pain and suffering, but it is very sad that thousands of people before and after 1989 lost out on their claims. I am glad that the Secretary of State for Scotland has said that the Government are getting rid of the small payment of £2,500, because it has been a disaster, but is it right for the Government to have gained through the clawback system from the pain and suffering of people with mesothelioma? Will those people be re-compensated? This is grave-robbing, and the families are suffering. It is not only the person working with asbestos dust who dies: it is the woman who washes the clothes and the children who greet their father or mother. That is the seriousness of the case.

I want to take a little time to explain some of the saddest cases. I want them to be recorded in *Hansard*, because I believe that the Government have taken a diabolical liberty over the years, especially as it has taken eight years, from 1989 to 1997, to get something done. Nothing would ever have been done if the Social Security Committee had not examined this unfair situation in 1995, or without the efforts of organisations such as Clydeside Action on Asbestos, the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, the Trades Union Congress and all the other unions involved. People do not think that the matter is serious; but thousands of people are dying because the environment that they walk through to get to work means that they have contracted mesothelioma or asbestosis, which is not as deadly.

Most people with mesothelioma, a cancer of the chest lining, die within one or two years of diagnosis. It is uniformly fatal and as ugly and horrible as it sounds. June Hancock, who is still alive, was diagnosed as having the disease in January 1994. She is still relatively active and mobile. She is enjoying some borrowed time, as she calls it, because she was one of the first people to win a claim as having contracted the dust in the environment. She won the last round of her historic legal battle for compensation for the damage done to her health by asbestos. It was the first example of the so-called third wave of environmental asbestos cases to reach the British courts. Many more similar compensation claims are likely.

June is now 60. When she was a child in Armley, a suburb of Leeds, she and her friends played in the streets around the former J W Roberts asbestos factory. White fibrous dust from the factory filled the air and built up in drifts in corners and against walls as the children played in the streets. In the loading bays of the factory, they would throw snowballs made of asbestos at each other in fun. The deadly particles steadily accumulated in their lungs.

Fourteen years ago, June Hancock watched her mother die a painful death from mesothelioma. Now she, too, has the disease, but early on she decided to fight it rather than give in. She has been sustained by the fight to win compensation from T and N plc, formerly Turner and Newall, of which J W Roberts is a subsidiary. She is one among many victims of a man-made epidemic—I call it the silent epidemic—that makes few headlines but is becoming impossible to ignore. While we worry that eating beef might trigger a rare brain disease, thousands of people have died not through any choice that they made, but from having once inhaled asbestos fibre in their workplace, home or school. They are the innocent victims of our modern industrialised society.

About 3,000 people die in Britain every year from asbestos-related disease; more than half die from mesothelioma. Asbestos has killed thousands of people since it was first exploited commercially at the end of the last century. It has been, and still is, the largest occupational killer in industrialised societies. It is not one among equals but the leader of the pack. The death toll is rising steeply.

The Health and Safety Executive, not a body given to wild predictions, said recently that, by 2025, there could be 10,000 deaths annually in Britain from asbestos-related disease. That is far more than are killed in road accidents or by AIDS-related illnesses. It is 200 times more than Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease has ever killed in a year. Over the past 20 years, we have learned that asbestos is dangerous stuff, to be avoided at all costs. Less often do we hear that it is too late for many thousands of June Hancocks—the people dying and doomed to die—or that thousands more are still being exposed to risk. In many places and trades, asbestos is a plague to come, yet Governments have ignored the dangers for most of the century. We are looking forward to a Labour Government taking action to stop the killer once and for all.

The basic dangers relating to asbestos have been recognised since the end of the last century. For example, the report of Her Majesty's lady inspector of factories of 1898 mentions the

"evil effects of asbestos dust".

In 1899, a 33-year-old man who came to consult Dr. Montague Murray at London's Charing Cross hospital seemed to be merely another victim of bronchitis until he mentioned that the other nine men who had worked with him spinning the new miracle substance—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I hesitate to intervene, but the hon. Gentleman is going rather wide of the Bill.

Mr. Wray: Those matters have never been raised in this Chamber. I do not see anything about it in *Hansard*.

[Mr. Wray]

However, they are important to the public and to my constituents. I have been dealing with cases of asbestosis and mesothelioma for several years. It has happened in schools, in the home, and in the workplace, and it is happening in the environment. It is time that the public had it brought to their attention and that the Government—and if not this Government, the next Labour Government—did something about it.

It is a dying shame that, over the years, the Government have allowed the Department of Social Security to defraud people who have died and suffered. They have defrauded families of the claims to which they were entitled. I know that this is an important subject and that many hon. Members wish to speak, but it is time that the nation faced its responsibilities and banned the substances that are imported into this country to make quick profit at the expense of people's lives.

5.46 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Like other hon. Members, I welcome the Bill because it goes some way to remedying a gross injustice created by the Social Security Act 1989. Nevertheless, I have some concerns to highlight.

The Bill is particularly welcome because it ring-fences general damages. The part of a payment that is made for pain and suffering is to be ring-fenced; deductions for social security payments will not be taken from that element of damages but will be restricted to the payment for loss of earnings. The 1989 Act allowed the deduction to be made from the global sum, which included pain and suffering, as well as payments for loss of earnings.

The other major part of the Bill is the removal of the £2,500 limit below which benefit recovery does not occur. That is welcome because the present system deters people from pursuing claims if they feel that they are likely to be penalised. Claims of more than £2,500 are sometimes not pursued as rigorously as they might be.

We should put the Bill in an historical context by considering the situation between 1948 and 1989 and then judge its worth. When the industrial injuries legislation was enacted in 1948, contributions were worked out between employer and employee. Because the employee contributed to the industrial injuries scheme through the national insurance scheme, it was agreed that the employer would be able to deduct 50 per cent. of all benefits from any settlement. The deduction was restricted to the loss of earnings element and did not affect that part of the payment relating to pain and suffering. The system worked well until the 1989 Act was introduced. The injustice that flowed from that Act has been illustrated by some of the examples given by previous speakers.

Half the benefits paid at that time—industrial injury benefit, disablement benefit and invalidity benefit—were deducted. What is not always taken into consideration, however, is the fact that, although the deduction reduced the amount of damages, if a person returns to work but cannot do the job that he had been doing before his accident or an equivalent job, a cushion of support in the form of a special hardship allowance is available. That later became the reduced earnings allowance, which was abolished in 1990. Although it is no longer available, in many cases enormous sums are deducted from damages payments.

I wish to refer the Minister to a particular case. Following an accident in 1989, the compensation recovery unit calculated that the deduction would be made until 11 April 1997 and stated:

"Amount to be deducted before payment and sent to us within 14 days of the date of payment of compensation"

will be £50,500.99. The case involved a miner, who had a small multiplier. The sum to be recovered by the compensation recovery unit has wiped out all the payment for loss of earnings and has taken a portion of the payment for pain and suffering.

Although we welcome the Bill, it will still wipe out considerable amounts of damages in cases such as I have cited. A person earning £10,000 a year with a multiplier of eight, where the element for loss of earnings is as much as £80,000, would receive a payment of £80,000 for loss of earnings. However, the deduction from that loss of earnings payment over a five-year period would be considerable.

As the Minister knows, in the type of case that I have quoted it would take a long time to determine the medical condition. It can take five or six years to determine whether an injury, particularly a head injury, is stable. Consequently, benefits accumulate while one is waiting for a medical condition to stabilise. Benefits that have accumulated over five years must be deducted in full, and, in many cases, the deductions wipe out the loss of earnings allowance.

If a worker can return to work but cannot continue his pre-accident occupation, there is no cushion to help him in a job that pays less than his pre-accident job. The position is therefore much worse today than it was between 1948 and 1989. Reduced earnings allowance is an essential payment and the Minister will agree that most of our partners in the European Union have a similar payment which helps to cushion the effects of light work when a person returns to a job that pays less than his pre-accident job.

Clause 2 provides that there is to be no retrospection. In effect, therefore, four different schemes are likely to operate. We shall be dealing, first, with cases of men injured under the old workmen's compensation legislation before 1948; secondly, with cases that occurred between 1948 and 1989; thirdly, with post-1989 cases that occurred before the introduction of this Bill; and, fourthly, with cases that occur after this Bill is enacted. The Minister should consider the complications that that is likely to cause and give some thought to retrospection, which would be enormously helpful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) made some important points about asbestosis. The Minister should consider whether it would now be wise to accept exemptions. It takes a long time for asbestosis to develop. Many people were exposed to asbestos in the 1950s. I am currently dealing with a claim by a miner who worked a machine that had asbestos brake linings and has recently developed an acute chest problem. He has been into hospital and part of his lung has been removed. His illness is attributable to the asbestos fibres that he inhaled during the 1950s when he worked that machine.

It is difficult to determine when asbestosis developed. That fact must be determined, particularly for disablement assessment. If disablement assessment goes back for many years, a sizeable lump-sum payment has to be made.

Under the Bill, whenever an award is made to compensate for negligence, a lump-sum payment is deducted from the loss of earnings element for five years. However, the deduction could be considerable and, in cases of asbestosis, could greatly reduce the amount available in a negligence claim. Will the Minister consider whether, at this stage, he is prepared to consider exemptions because asbestosis should be exempt from deductions? The disease has special characteristics and it is only fair that it should be exempt from the provisions in the Bill.

The Bill is to be welcomed because it takes us a little further down the road towards fairness, although much more needs to be done. I hope that we can outline that more fully in Committee.

5.58 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me, and I apologise for missing the opening speeches because of other parliamentary business.

I very much welcome the Bill, for the reasons expressed by other hon. Members. I worked for several years alongside Clydeside Action on Asbestos, to which tribute has been paid tonight. It is an enormous tribute to that group that, although a handful of the cases that affect the compensation recovery unit are asbestos cases, tonight's debate has been dominated by that issue.

We should not be here today if Clydeside Action on Asbestos had not lobbied Parliament in November 1994 and if we had not together persuaded the Social Security Select Committee to investigate the unit's work. It is a credit to our democracy that a relatively small local group, working with Members of Parliament, can change the law. Had it not done so, the work of the compensation recovery unit would have continued unchanged.

The Select Committee's report turned the tide. It was a tremendous eye-opener for all members of the Select Committee to discover what was happening in their name. The report was damning, and said that the results of many cases were contrary to natural justice.

Let us consider the scale of the problem. In 1995, the compensation recovery unit was reclaiming much more than £100 million a year from more than 30,000 people who had been victims of accidents, diseases or illnesses for which other people were culpable. In that year, more than 1,500 people were paying back more than £15,000 in benefits. The highest sum that I could find was £94,000, which was paid back by a person who had neck injuries. Imagine the suffering that must have been involved to have led to the payment of £94,000 in benefits.

When the issue received publicity in the *Daily Mirror*, I received more than 150 letters from people who were outraged by what had happened to them—not only asbestos sufferers but people who had been in road accidents, those with industrial diseases, and victims of industrial accidents or any affliction that had been caused by other people.

One of the great evils of the CRU's work—implementing legislation and the Conservative Government's instructions—is that it has further undermined the insurance principle. My constituents and others believed that they had paid their stamp and would receive benefits in the event of catastrophe, but the Government clawed back that benefit. People were outraged: what was the point of paying the stamp if they were obliged to pay back the benefits?

I shall concentrate my remarks on the asbestos issues, which especially interest me because, regrettably, Clydebank in my constituency is the national leader for male deaths from mesothelioma. Our death rate is 11 times the national average because of the deadly cocktail in our background of shipyards, ship repairing and an asbestos factory.

The 10 areas that head the Government's list—the Health and Safety Executive list—for asbestos deaths are all ports. Wherever there have been ports and shipbuilding, asbestos has caused carnage. Between 1976 and 1991, in Greater Glasgow, there were 500 deaths from mesothelioma alone—not asbestos-related diseases as a whole. According to the Government, the people who died came into contact with the dust between 50 and 60 years ago; as has been said, asbestos-related diseases are by far the biggest industrial killer, and the problem is getting worse.

According to the Department of the Environment, there will be between 1,300 and 3,000 deaths from mesothelioma in 20 years' time, which dwarfs all industrial deaths, deaths on the road and deaths from any similar cause. If we take into account the fact that there are estimated to be between one and two deaths from asbestos-related lung cancer for every death caused by mesothelioma, we realise the scale of the continuing problem.

Can the House imagine the appalling way in which we have treated those sufferers? They must prove that they are suffering from an asbestos-related disease, which is not easy when many of them have been heavy smokers. They must prove where they contracted the disease, perhaps 50 to 60 years ago, and find evidence. They must enter the legal system against an asbestos industry that knew decades ago that it was killing people but decided to go on doing it, and if they win they must pay back any benefit that they have received.

The most immoral aspect of the Government's action is that they have clawed back money that was awarded for pain and suffering, although they had no right to it. That was repulsive, immoral theft, and I am glad that it is to end. I am pleased that the Government have moved on the issue, but they can claim no credit for being forced to amend what they set up. I nevertheless pay credit to the Minister, who has been unfailingly courteous on this matter.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): That is out of character.

Mr. Worthington: I regret to say to my hon. Friend that it is true that the Minister has been unfailingly courteous on this matter.

The Social Security Select Committee deserves credit for suggesting that the polluter should pay: that those who cause the accident, illness or disease should pay back any benefits to the Government. That should concentrate minds and lead to earlier and larger settlements, as the clock will be ticking, not against the employee—the victim—but against the employer and insurance companies.

I pay a final tribute to Clydeside Action on Asbestos because I am convinced that without that group we should not be improving the law today. I express, as have others, the hope that improvements will be made in Committee.

[Mr. Worthington]

There is a powerful case for exempting mesothelioma from the workings of a clawback. I also want to remember those people who have died feeling bitterly let down and angered by a so-called welfare state that kicked them as they were dying an appalling, painful death. They should be remembered today.

6.6 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I happily join my hon. Friends the Members for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) in paying tribute to Clydeside Action on Asbestos, because I am sure that all my hon. Friends are right that we should not have made the progress that we have in this campaign but for the work done by that organisation.

I am surprised that Conservative Members have not taken part in the debate because, although there are serious cases in shipyard and port areas, surely in every constituency there must be people who have had compensation clawed back by the compensation recovery unit—sometimes in grotesquely unjust circumstances.

I have been involved in this issue from its fairly early stages. I recall initiating an Adjournment debate, which was replied to by the right hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), who is now responsible for prisons but was then responsible for social security—we may draw what conclusions we like from that. I also met her to discuss cases from my constituency.

I must be courteous to the Minister. The Bill makes a small but important step in the right direction in recognising the iniquity of clawing back compensation awarded in respect of pain and suffering to people who have been injured at work through no fault of their own, but I share the complaint made by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham): that the provisions start from later this year. What about all those people, including several of my constituents, and no doubt people throughout the United Kingdom, who have had their payments for pain and suffering clawed back in the eight years since 1989? It was never right for the Department of Social Security to claw back money that was awarded by the courts for pain and suffering.

Can the Minister give the amount that was paid in respect of pain and suffering and clawed back by the compensation recovery unit in those eight years? Will he please, even at this late stage, consider the overwhelming case for making the provision retrospective? If it is right not to claw back that money from claimants in future, surely it must be wrong for the DSS to hang on to the money that it has illegitimately clawed back from people who have claimed on the same grounds in the past.

6.9 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): Important points have been made in the debate, but the overwhelming concern is to get the Bill on to the statute book. Time is running out. If, as expected, the Government call a May election, it is vital in the interests of all the considerations that have been mentioned this evening that we get the Bill into Committee and through its remaining stages, so that it will start to benefit people who have been suffering for many years.

I congratulate my hon. Friends who have contributed to the debate—my hon. Friends the Members for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke), for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray), for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham), for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) and for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson). The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) also contributed to the consensus that prevails in the House and the country on the matter.

It is rare that we achieve consensus, and when we do, we should take advantage of it. Despite some of the concerns that have been expressed, the Bill is positive and it takes the issue forward. Legislation should always be seen to be building for the future. We may want to return to the issue in later months or years, but the Bill represents a significant step forward.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), the shadow Secretary of State for Social Security, said that prevention was better than compensation. That sends a powerful message to the workplaces of Britain that much of what has been achieved is fine, but much more remains to be done to make our workplaces safe, secure and friendlier environments for people to work in. The Bill does not deal with those issues but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Provan suggested, it is important that we debate the issues and record our concern. Progress has been made, but we have much more to do.

I want to put on record my appreciation of Clydeside Action on Asbestos. If democracy is to work, we as the elected representatives must have groups to pressurise us to bring about positive changes. The action group, supported by others, has been influential, and helpful work has been done by the Trades Union Congress, which is keen for the Bill to be passed.

It is important to recognise that we can have consensus on issues in Britain. The Government, the Opposition, the minority parties, the TUC and action groups throughout the country all say that changes are necessary to the payment of compensation, and we have almost completed the first part of the process.

In Committee we must deal briefly with issues. Outstanding issues remain, and these have been highlighted by my hon. Friends. An important aspect is the start date for the legislation. We hope that the Bill will complete its passage through Parliament before April, but October 1997 is the date on which it is to be implemented. When the Minister replies, will he tell us why, if the legislation has been enacted by then, it cannot take effect from April 1997, instead of October? That would send another message: not only are we concerned to get the Bill enacted, but we are keen for it to benefit people at the earliest opportunity. That would reflect well on the House and on both Government and Opposition.

I seek an assurance from the Government that with our wholehearted co-operation the remaining stages of the Bill's passage will be completed quickly. There is no reason why that should not be accomplished in the time span that we discussed, and I am sure that such reassurances will be forthcoming.

The preponderance of Scots—complemented by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone—who participated in the debate is no coincidence. In areas that have undergone tough industrial times and years of hardship, the legacy of many industries

remains. As an economy is modernised, the products of the old are evident alongside the benefits of the new. It is no surprise that my hon. Friends should speak passionately from the Opposition Benches—I almost made a slip and said the Government Benches, but that is a few weeks ahead. Even in a debate on a technical measure, there is no reason why hon. Members should not show that they care.

On issues that affect people's income and hardship, we must be clear that the Bill is not the end of the story. Many organisations will see it as a welcome step forward. There has been cross-party endorsement and endorsement from those who belong to no party. That is encouraging. The Bill should be seen as part of a process of improving working environments, improving compensation and ensuring that those who should pay up do pay up. If that message is sent out to the country, it will do a great deal for the victims and for the credibility of the House.

6.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): I thank all hon. Members who have spoken for the support that they offered for the measure. The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) asked for reassurances from the Government that we would do everything in our power to speed up the Bill's progress. I hope that, by general agreement, that will be possible.

If I may summarise the hon. Gentleman's winding-up speech, the main question—apart from collateral issues—was whether the measure could take effect in April rather than October this year. I shall deal with that shortly.

It is important that I have an opportunity to respond to the hon. Members who have spoken. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), who opened for the Opposition, made a point that was taken up by several speakers: that all personal injury action cases begin with a personal tragedy of injury or death, and that prevention is very much better than compensation. It is common ground that money will never compensate for the misery involved. The Bill, however, is directed at the narrow issue of the triangular relationship among the three parties involved, and how it should operate fairly and appropriately.

The hon. Lady described that clearly, but she mentioned a number of other matters which arise out of the Bill but go beyond it—the question of the extent to which information should be provided by the Department to encourage the promotion of personal injury claims. Because the Bill removes disincentives in a particular group of cases, it will indeed encourage litigation in appropriate cases, but the hon. Lady went on to argue that further steps should be taken by the Government. Perhaps one of the strangest sights these days is the advertisements that appear on the back of buses for lawyers offering to take up these cases. Trade unions have had a distinguished record in helping their members to bring that kind of litigation over the years.

The hon. Lady asked whether the Secretary of State could go further and either fund claims or step into the shoes of the plaintiff. She used the precise, professional language that I would expect of her: the language of subrogation. That is what occurs in private insurance—although one never bothers to read it on one's insurance policy. If the insurance company pays, it stands in the person's shoes and controls the litigation. That is the end of it as far as the individual is concerned, and the insurer is in the driving seat.

The Government deliberately rejected that model in 1989 because we believed that it would involve direct interference in virtually every personal injury litigation. We thought that it was more appropriate to allow the parties to determine how they pursue and conduct the litigation, but nevertheless to operate the process of compensation recovery after they had done so. I do not wish to describe such a proposal for subrogation too unkindly as nationalising personal injuries litigation. However, the Government were reluctant to become involved to that extent.

I turn to the issue raised by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) and by several other hon. Members regarding asbestos and the powerful and persuasive role played by the Clydeside Action on Asbestos group. Asbestosis has several formidable and unpleasant features. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) graphically described the experiences and the misery of his constituents who suffer from that extremely horrible disease. Its consequences were not apparent in the past, and people either did not realise the danger or failed to take adequate precautions.

Asbestosis cases are among the most horrible, graphic and difficult of personal litigation cases. I think that the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington)—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) corrects me on my Scottish pronunciation; it clearly is not adequate and I apologise to everyone involved. The hon. Gentleman correctly said that we must prove where the disease was contracted, prove the consequence and then establish the negligence. Many people, particularly the hon. Member for Provan, think that the latter issue should be easier to establish. However, the process of establishing the links in particular cases has proved long, bitter and difficult.

Despite those problems, people have succeeded in bringing such claims. The unhappiest features of the 1990 scheme, which this Bill reforms, were most horribly and graphically displayed in relation to existing asbestosis cases. However, it is difficult to see how we could go further in respect of asbestosis, and exactly what remedy and course Opposition Members advocate. It may be argued that asbestosis cases should be taken completely outside common law litigation, and that a special compensation scheme should be established. The pneumoconiosis scheme and the criminal injuries compensation scheme were mentioned in that regard.

The difficulty is that statutory schemes of compensation are not usually—I stress that this is the general rule—as generous as common law damages when one succeeds in proving one's case. Therefore, I suspect that there would be some reluctance to retreat from the common law situation. I appreciate that this group of people have suffered the worst effects of the 1990 arrangements. However, under the ring fencing for pain and suffering, that group is likely to benefit more than any other from the legislation. Mesothelioma, one of the worst manifestations of asbestosis, tends to strike many years after the event, often when a person has retired. Therefore, there would be no loss of earnings. As schedule 2

[Mr. Roger Evans]

carefully limits what may be set off against what, the pain and suffering—as is intended by the legislation—should be recovered by the plaintiff, whole and undiminished.

Mr. Worthington: A range of diseases are associated with asbestos, of which mesothelioma is one. If the Minister is not willing to exempt the whole range of asbestos-related diseases, will he examine the special circumstances of mesothelioma before the Committee stage—I shall not be able to serve on that Committee—and consider whether a case could be made to exclude it from the provisions?

Mr. Evans: I am happy to examine that argument. If the hon. Gentleman or any other hon. Member wishes to discuss the matter further, I shall be delighted to do so.

The hon. Member for Midlothian made one slip of the tongue, as a result of which I hope to encourage him. He referred to people dying as a result of asbestosis and to widows suffering recoupment of benefits. Fatal accident damages are excluded under the 1990 scheme for compensation recovery.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) argued—we may return to the issue in Committee—that the Bill should provide for some form of breakdown of the defendant's offer. I am reluctant to be persuaded by that argument, as parties to a personal injury action do not need to agree upon anything other than the fact that both sides are prepared to go away for X thousand pounds, with costs to be taxed if not agreed. The parties may disagree totally about liability, contributory negligence and the medical issues, but they know that they are agreed upon whatever sum proves satisfactory to both parties. Once we start going beyond the process that is already embodied in the court rules of exchanging in the process of negotiations what each party's contentions are for particular heads of damage, we are likely to promote confusion rather than a speedy settlement.

I am conscious that time is passing, so I shall deal with several specific points. The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) gave an example, and I would be grateful if he will explain later the figures that he cited. I suggest that he is not necessarily correct in his example, as I understand it. Let us suppose that his case is the worst sort and takes a full five years to settle, resulting in a loss of earnings of £80,000. The loss of earnings benefit specified in schedule 2 can be set off against that. At common law, if the loss of earnings goes beyond the five-year period, or there is handicap in the labour market, there may be further damages for reduced earnings in the future, and Smith and Manchester damages for handicap in the labour market. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman needs to worry about that.

I shall conclude with the important question whether the legislation should be brought into effect in April.

Mr. Eric Clarke: I am concerned about the delay in the appeals procedure and the compensation recovery unit taking back money. As I have said, that process could take much longer than the original case.

Mr. Evans: I apologise to both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), who also raised that important point. They are right to be concerned about delays in the appeals process regarding compensation recovery. Happily, the number of appeals even under the existing scheme has proved far fewer than anticipated or feared. The Bill will simplify, and one hopes speed up, the appeals process. I shall write to both hon. Gentlemen and provide the statistics on those delays. I will be happy to examine the issue further in Committee.

Several hon. Members asked whether the measure might be introduced before October or retrospectively. I follow the argument of the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson): if the way in which it has been done since 1990 is wrong, should it not be possible to compensate those who have suffered unfair losses according to the new scheme?

However, it would be difficult to unscramble cases settled over that period when we do not know the basis of settlement. For example, we do not have the information to answer his question as to how much pain and suffering damages have been eroded in specific cases, let alone in total. There may well, of course, be a small fraction of cases, in which a judge has determined the case, where there is a definitive breakdown, but those are a few cases out of a hundred. They are the exceptions. It is just not practical or possible to unscramble them. I regret that that must be my answer.

Dr. Godman: The Under-Secretary of State speaks like a lawyer.

Mr. Evans: I am a lawyer. I have practised on personal injuries at the Bar. I have seen these tragic cases while acting for people who have suffered from them. Every hon. Member who made the point that we are talking not about statistics but about human blood is absolutely right.

This is not quite "no retrospection". When the accident occurred is immaterial. We will catch claims if they are in the pipeline. The difficulty with introducing that before October is that the regulations have to be made, and there have to be the usual consultation procedures. Perhaps the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) will offer to speed that up. I shall talk to him about that afterwards if he wishes. The second issue is the administration of the CRU. It is the Government's view that it is not practical to speed it up at this stage.

I commend the Bill to the House for a Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

SOCIAL SECURITY (RECOVERY OF BENEFITS) BILL [*LORDS*] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses of the Secretary of State incurred in consequence of the Act, and

(2) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of sums paid to the Secretary of State under the Act and estimated by him to relate to payments out of money provided by Parliament.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Bill [*Lords*]

Read a second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills),

That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Peter Ainsworth.*]

Question agreed to.

Further proceedings postponed, pursuant to Order—[20 February].

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (SCOTLAND) BILL [*LORDS*] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

Bill immediately considered in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 277 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 278

CITATION, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Amendment proposed: No. 1, in page 184, line 34, leave out subsection (5).—[*Mr. Peter Ainsworth.*]

6.33 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): We agree with the provisions of the Bill, and it is a welcome measure, but I would like the Minister to explain why the amendment was tabled. What is its aim? Who has he consulted? What are its implications?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): This amendment removes the privilege amendment that was inserted in another place.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 278, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 18 agreed to.

Bill, as amended, reported; read the Third time, and passed, with an amendment.

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Bill [*Lords*]

Read a Second time.

6.35 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to take up your time and that of the House, but are you able to confirm that, during this procedure, I can ask the Minister a question relating to a clause in the Bill?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, on clauses.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of bills), That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Peter Ainsworth.*]

Question agreed to.

Further proceedings postponed, pursuant to Order—[20 February].

PLANNING (LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS) (SCOTLAND) BILL [LORDS] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase by or under the Act in the sums so payable.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

Bill immediately considered in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 41 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question proposed, That clauses 42 to 53 stand part of the Bill.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): A number of clauses concern buildings that have suffered severe deterioration. For example, the Gourock ropeworks in Port Glasgow is in the most appalling condition. What powers does the Minister have under clause 47 to acquire that building, or to allow the local authority to acquire it, so that it can be demolished? I am the last person to argue for a listed building to be demolished, particularly one with such a noted industrial and architectural heritage, but the Minister knows how long I have pursued this case.

If the Minister cannot answer now, I hope that he will deal with the matter under this group of clauses. For the people of Port Glasgow, that appalling situation has festered for far too long. I believe that these clauses allow the Minister to act decisively, along with Historic Scotland, to bring an end to the matter by allowing the local authority to demolish the building.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): The hon. Gentleman has raised the issue of the Gourock ropeworks on numerous occasions in the past. I am sure that he is aware that this is purely a consolidation measure: the Bill does not change any legislation; it consolidates it. I take his point on board, and I shall write to him with the updated position on that building, which I know is of great concern to him.

Question put and agreed to.

Clauses 42 to 53 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 54 to 82 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 83

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Amendment made: No. 1, in clause 83, page 49, line 24, leave out subsection (4).—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Clause 83, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 3 agreed to.

Bill, as amended, reported; read the Third time, and passed, with an amendment.

PLANNING (HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES) (SCOTLAND) BILL [*LORDS*]

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 58A (Consolidation Bills), That the Bill be not committed.—[*Mr. Peter Ainsworth.*]

Question agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

PLANNING (CONSEQUENTIAL PROVISIONS) (SCOTLAND) BILL [*LORDS*]

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 58A (Consolidation Bills), That the Bill be not committed.—[*Mr. Peter Ainsworth.*]

Question agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

National Heritage Bill [*Lords*]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE NATIONAL HERITAGE MEMORIAL FUND

6.46 pm

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 10,, after 'aesthetic', insert 'anthropological, sociological,'.

Clause 1 extends the list of bodies eligible to receive lottery funds. My amendment would include in that list things with a sociological or anthropological interest, thus enabling communities to be included. The Bill will allow the trustees to provide financial assistance to projects which would, among other things, secure

"the preservation or enhancement of such things"

and would encourage

"the maintenance and development of the skills required for their preservation or enhancement".

It would make sense to include in both those provisions the preservation of a community for a community.

Clause 1(3) provides that financial assistance may be given to various projects, including projects to

"acquire property of any kind (including land)".

That aspect is of interest to me in my capacity as my party's spokesperson on both environment and land.

The amendment arose from a discussion that I had in January with Ms Anthea Case, director of the national heritage memorial fund, as a result of the rejection of the bid submitted by the Isle of Eigg trust to buy the Isle of Eigg. The meeting was an attempt to clarify the reasons for that rejection. The decision was complex, but it was clear from the meeting with Ms Case that the board considered that, in the terms of the legislation, heritage did not include people or communities. She also said that, although the definition in the Bill was much wider, it still would not have included the interests of the community or objectives such as relieving poverty.

In the case of the Isle of Eigg trust, there was a perceived potential for a conflict between the interests of the community and the interests of heritage as defined by the legislation. That was also described as a conflict between the private interests of the community and the public interests of the nation. In the trust's constitution, community representatives had a greater interest than the so-called national heritage interest, as represented by the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I am well aware of the issue that the hon. Lady is raising. It has caused concern to me as well—and to my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who has raised it with the national heritage memorial fund. My only anxiety is that this may be a rather complicated way of trying to resolve a problem which could be resolved more simply. I say that in as helpful a way as possible. Perhaps it is due to a natural reticence about seeing the concerns of people defined as sociological and anthropological, rather than being defined more precisely in terms of the community aspect of the heritage lottery fund.

Ms Cunningham: We felt that the issue needed to be resolved, and we had a clear opportunity to do that—

especially in view of Miss Case's advice that, as the Bill currently stood, the definition of "heritage" would not cover the circumstances that arose in the Isle of Eigg trust. It was deemed that there was a risk that social and economic objectives on the island could take precedence over so-called heritage interests, and that that would continue to be an issue even after the present Bill, with its extension, went through—as it presumably would.

The opportunity that the Bill presented to widen the definition to include community interests gave rise to the amendment, but if there are better ways of doing it I should be interested to hear about them. We want the change to be made so that bids such as that of the Isle of Eigg trust can be made and have a chance of succeeding without being ruled out on the basis of technicalities. I would argue—as would many other hon. Members—that the preservation of a community is not the same as the private interests of the individual, but the issue appeared to be being presented in those terms. A sustainable and healthy community is a prerequisite for a sustainable environment.

Eigg is a very beautiful island, which ought to be preserved; but it is also an island of great need, where people live without mains electricity, gas, a public water supply or refuse disposal arrangements. All those are practical difficulties which must be dealt with.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Surely there is little or no difference between the acquisition of an island and the acquisition of an estate. There is no difference between an attempt by people living on an island to buy that island, and a similar attempt by people living on an estate.

Ms Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman may be making an analogy with the Assynt crofters. There has been one other occasion in Scotland on which this kind of community interest has been paramount and has, in a sense, taken precedence over individual private interests. As Scottish Members will know, ownership of Eigg has received extensive publicity over many years, and we all know of the difficulties to which private absentee ownership has led for the community there. That is why there is so much anxiety about the decision in this instance.

I have outlined some of the practical difficulties that the community has to bear and which are a result of the negligence of successive absentee landlords. The island and the estate had been allowed to deteriorate and the people faced a very insecure future.

Dr. Godman: Many of us would much prefer the island to be owned by a trust rather than by such eccentric characters as Mr. Schellenberg.

Ms Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman is right. The recent history of the Isle of Eigg has caused grave concern, and community ownership would seem a far more secure arrangement for the future than the current ownership by Mr. Marumma—which is in itself problematic—and the previous ownership by Mr. Schellenberg, which lasted for many years and during which very little was done for the community.

The bid for the community was a partnership between Highland council and the Scottish Wildlife Trust, and won the support of many hon. Members on both sides of the House. It was made in the recognition that securing a sustainable future for the community and securing the same for the island were inextricably linked. The same circumstances can be seen in other parts of Scotland, but they may also be in evidence in other parts of the United Kingdom.

It is a peculiar and restrictive definition of "heritage" that excludes the survival of communities, as the Bill at present appears to do. In Scotland, certainly, heritage is about much more than the Churchill papers, the opera house or, indeed, the national museums. As the director of the Scottish Wildlife Trust said at the time of the rejection of the bid:

> "To buy back a Scottish island . . . from its absentee . . . owner and regenerate and protect it for future generations to come would seem to me to be a perfect heritage project."

That was how it was seen on both sides of the political divide in Scotland.

Arguably, community ownership in Scotland revives a much older aspect of, in particular, highland heritage: the indissoluble link between people and place. I believe that a concept of heritage that included people and community would be supported by the vast number of members of the Scottish public who buy lottery tickets every week.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): The hon. Lady is right in saying that cultural heritage is part of the general heritage. Is not the case of the Isle of Eigg, however, similar to that of the Isle of Raasay, or that of the Scilly islands off Cornwall? What matters is the sustainable development that can be encouraged on those islands, rather than the question of ownership. The infamous Dr. Green on Raasay was a prime example of the same thing more than 30 years ago. Encouraging the economic life of the community is more important than ownership.

Ms Cunningham: That may be so in theory, but our experience in Scotland tells us that it is not necessarily so in practice. Certainly, the Assynt crofters have built a far more sustainable future for Assynt than they had under the previous ownership, and so far the individual ownership of the Isle of Eigg has not so far shown the possibility to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

The people who live on Eigg put up with an extraordinary position for a long time. Only then did they decide that the only answer for the future was to buy the island as a community. They are, in a sense, following the precedent laid down by the Assynt crofters, although the land ownership and the issues are different. We should allow this development to take place. I shall be interested to hear the Government's response, especially in the light of Miss Case's view that under the Bill, even as it stands, the people cannot really be included in the concept of heritage. I know that views may differ, but in the absence of any clear guideline I intend to press the amendment.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I support the principle of the amendment, which is interesting in an historical context. The national heritage memorial fund did not appear out of thin air: it has a distinguished pedigree which, sadly, has been largely forgotten in the course of time. Its origins lie in the

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

national land fund which was set up by the post-war Labour Government and which Hugh Dalton described in his Budget statement as a memorial to those who had fallen in the second world war

"better than any work of art in stone or bronze."—[*Official Report*, 9 April 1946; Vol. 421, c. 1840.]

The purpose of the national land fund was to acquire properties for the enjoyment of the nation and to ensure access for the enjoyment of the nation. The fund's achievements in its early years were stunning. Many properties and areas of land were bought for the nation in that period, and they are still enjoyed by the common people of every part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton) *rose—*

Mr. Wilson: I think I know what my hon. Friend has to say.

Mr. McFall: My hon. Friend will remember that one of the first uses to which the fund was put was to purchase land on Ben Lomond and Loch Lomond. Fifty years later, there has still not been any progress in that area. My hon. Friend will correct me if I am wrong.

7 pm

Mr. Wilson: I think that my hon. Friend is right. The one that I was thinking of, which I believe is in his constituency, was Rowardennan—

Mr. McFall: The same property.

Mr. Wilson: It is the same property. It was bought for access by people, and particularly for the Scottish Youth Hostels Association, I believe. There is a long list. It was a fantastic period of acquisition, but not for the state—that is the important point—which used its interventionist role to acquire the land and property for third parties. The Balmacara estate in Lochalsh is another obvious example. It was bought through the national land fund and handed over to the National Trust for Scotland. Throughout Britain, such properties were acquired.

I need hardly say that the Tories hated the concept from the outset. They resisted the setting up of the national land fund. They were not interested in war memorials which took the form of giving ordinary people access to the land. Stone and bronze might be all right, but certainly not land, so the Tories opposed the setting up of the fund, and when they inherited power in 1951 they set about destroying it.

Initially the Tories did that by stealth. They allowed the national land fund to fall into disuse and there were no further acquisitions. Then, around 1955, Peter Thorneycroft in his Budget robbed the fund of its assets and returned them to the Exchequer, leaving a small fraction of what had originally been there. The Tories then slipped through an important clause which allowed the fund to acquire not only land and property, but the contents of property. In that way, with one piece of sleight of hand the national land fund was transformed from a land fund, as its name suggested, into an arts fund. It became a slush fund for the owners of stately homes and other properties. It was used for buying works of art and as a subsidy for the people who had such things to sell.

The Tories changed the fund's name to the national heritage fund and in the fulness of time that became the national heritage memorial fund, which in turn spawned the national heritage lottery fund, so there is a straight continuum.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): May I put the hon. Gentleman right? I took the legislation through the House in 1979 or 1980. The word "memorial" was added in Committee because we wanted to mark the relationship with those who had given their lives in the war. That was an important step. I am not saying that what the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) says in principle may not be right, but it would be worrying to change the principle of that legislation without more detailed consultation than we are having today.

Mr. Wilson: The right hon. Gentleman can rest assured that we are not going to change the legislation tonight without having more detailed consideration, but it is an important marker to lay down. I have sufficient respect for the right hon. Gentleman to think that it may well have been he who did it. After a 40-year gap, the concept of "memorial" was restored to the fund. It is an important reminder that its origins, as I am sure he would endorse, were as a memorial fund to buy land for the enjoyment of the nation.

Until recent years, the national heritage memorial fund would not consider the acquisition of land. It has been an advance that in recent years it has been prepared to recognise that land is a vital part of the national heritage and it has supported some important acquisitions on that basis. It has supported the acquisition of Strathaird on Skye by the John Muir trust, Glen Feshie in the Cairngorms and other lands of which the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) is well aware.

That is good, but the fund still has to demonstrate a case in terms of the environment to have an interventionist role. The proposition that it should be able to intervene on social as well as environmental grounds is modest superficially, but has far-reaching consequences because it would be a device whereby Government could intervene to rescue not only communities such as Eigg, which has been mentioned, but many others, where there is a will and a need for community ownership as the only device for sustaining the economy and the social fabric of the region. But the money simply is not available.

In other words, the fund could act as an interventionist instrument in the market for land. On that basis, it is an admirable concept to promote. I have advocated it in the past and I hope to do so again, but the key to the whole land question is that there must be ways of intervening in the market and that the highest bidder must not be allowed to prevail because the record of the highest bidder has been disastrous in many areas.

For many years, Eigg was under the benign ownership of the Runciman shipping family, but paradoxically, just as with the Horlicks in Gigha or other benevolent landowners, it is they who best demonstrate the weakness of the system because, inevitably, the benevolent landowner dies and every time that happens the lottery starts all over again and the community do not know who they are going to end up with.

Eigg ended up initially with a terrible man called Farnham-Smith, an imposter who claimed to be a commander. It turned out eventually that he had once been

a very junior officer in the London fire brigade, but by then he had scammed public money and visited a terrible blight on Eigg—followed by Schellenberg and Maruma, and we all know that story.

However, Eigg is not an isolated example, but a general principle. There must be means of intervening in the land market. The one that we are discussing is interesting and has great potential and my main purpose in rising to speak was to point out that it has a strong and important historical pedigree.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): As so often in these matters, I find myself in considerable agreement with the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), although I notice that he can speak with authority about the power of ownership—in his case, the power of the ownership of the press, which he never hesitates to use to the full to attack people who happen not to belong to his political party. I go along entirely with him in rebutting the arguments of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who suggested that ownership was not a significant factor in considering land matters.

I take the history of this back beyond the history to which the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North referred. He might agree with me, as I do with him, that Lloyd George, after the first world war, played a notable part in making land available for soldiers returning from the war. The outcome of that role is that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is a significant landowner. In another measure, we are considering whether that land should be brought closer to the communities than it has been under the ownership of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

I have also had a long history of seeking to bring the ownership of land in the community to the community. When I was in the Labour party, I proposed a Bill, which alas did not enjoy universal support from the Labour party at the time, to require owners of land either to disgorge their land or to accept higher tax rates on it if they were not prepared to meet certain community development standards. Unfortunately, those arguments fell on deaf ears until they were taken up by Sir Kenneth Alexander in the Highlands and Islands development board, who put forward proposals that were very close to those that I had advocated some years earlier. Those proposals were, once again, not acted on by the then Labour Government and fell when that Government fell, and no more has been heard of them since.

Mr. Wilson: As we are swapping anecdotes in this potted history of the land issue, perhaps the hon. Gentleman will recall where he stood on the Crofting Reform Act 1976. If people such as I had been supported by people such as him—he was then representing the Labour party in Parliament—in advocating community rather than individual croft ownership of land, most assuredly the highlands and islands would be a much better place today.

Mr. Maclennan: I must admit that I have always found it easier to represent the interests of my constituents, not as a whipped Labour Member but as an independent-minded member of an independent-minded party. The straitjacket that I was in in 1976 was made the tighter by the fact that I was a member of that Government.

The reality is that land and land ownership is the key to the well-being of many communities, and that their future could be greatly assisted by the widening of the ambit of the national heritage memorial fund, which is what we are debating today. I am glad that the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) has moved amendment No. 1, because it has given us an opportunity to consider the matter in some detail. Like her, I have great sympathy with the objective of obtaining for the people ownership of the island of Eigg. However, I do not believe that the people who live there—some of whom have come quite recently—are a part of the heritage in quite the way that she described. The important feature is the capacity of those who are living there productively to develop their land, not to keep the land in aspic.

The Assynt case to which the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross referred is important, both as a precedent and as a spur to other communities to do likewise. It is a precedent in that several public funds assisted the Assynt crofters trust to acquire ownership of the land. The trust was assisted by the local authority, by the local enterprise company, Highland and Islands Enterprise, and by many individuals across the length and breadth of the country.

The virtue and value of ownership is demonstrable. Paragraphs 1(3)(1) and 1(3)(2) are too narrowly defined to take account fully of those opportunities, although I realise that clause 1 allows trustees to provide assistance when the interest to be protected is of a scenic, aesthetic, archaeological or scientific nature. I think that all those interests exist in the case of the isle of Eigg, and therefore find it hard to believe that the application was refused on the ground of the narrowness of clause 1. It is beyond argument that the island of Eigg is important, and that it is a suitable case for such treatment.

7.15 pm

The island of Canna was an example of beneficent ownership when owned by John Lorne Campbell. It came into the ownership of the National Trust through his bounty, and it remains a remarkable testimony to enlightened ownership—in sharp contrast to some of the other cases that have been mentioned in this debate, including the isle of Raasay.

I believe that it should be possible to seek assistance from the national heritage memorial fund to acquire land for purposes of strengthening community existence in areas such as those under discussion. I am not certain that to describe the ends as "anthropological" or "sociological", as the amendment does, assists in the goal of strengthening community existence. Notwithstanding my doubts on that, however, I think that the purpose behind the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross merits our support. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell the House today that the Government's intention is that such cases should be open to assistance if such assistance is suitable in the view of the trustees, and that there is nothing in the Bill to prevent communities from so acquiring the lands.

I can understand objections to using the national heritage memorial fund to provide electricity, water or other forms of aid that might be necessary to sustain the development of an island. That would seem to be a more appropriate task for economic or social development agencies, such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise or the local enterprise company. To acquire ownership of land, however, seems to go right back to the fund's original purposes, on which the current fund is based. I am entirely

[Mr. Maclennan]

at one with the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North on that, and I hope that he will say so in his columns in the *West Highland Free Press*.

Dr. Godman: I promise that my speech will be exceedingly brief. I should like to tell the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) that I am at one with him in his comments on the use of the national heritage memorial fund. I should also like to tell the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro)—who was far too modest to mention his role in the 1979–80 proceedings—that his actions led to the insertion of the term "national heritage memorial fund". We owe him a vote of thanks.

I have some sympathy for the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham), although I, too, winced when I saw the terms "sociological" and "anthropological". I am sure that she would argue that she used those terms merely as a technical device.

As for the Eigg trust, I have every sympathy for the people who live on that beautiful island. The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) asked the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross a question on sustainable development. I believe that the island could have sustainable economic development through, for example, tourism, and perhaps through fishing and one or two related activities.

A few years ago, on one beautiful summer's day, I and other members of the then Scottish Select Committee visited the island. It was then owned by Mr. Schellenberg. I recall—not that it had anything to do with the right hon. Member for Dumfries or myself—that, on the very day that we visited, the island had its first robbery. He, my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey), the late Nicholas Fairbairn and I picked up quite a few fivers and tenners in the heather.

The people of the island have been treated badly by a succession of owners. Mr. Schellenberg, with respect, could be described as an eccentric. More recently, a German who is supposed to be an artist promised all types of things to the islanders but delivered not one of them. In moving amendment No. 1, the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross has argued a good case for the Eigg trust, which I think is worthy of support. We should be able to use the national heritage memorial fund to enable communities to acquire land. I look forward to the day when the Scottish Grand Committee debates the important and controversial issue of who owns and manages the land of Scotland.

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): As regards the terms of the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham), I hope that I can satisfy her—although I have my doubts—that the words that she wishes to insert into the Bill are both unnecessary and undesirable.

Clause 1 inserts into the National Heritage Act 1980 two new provisions defining the scope of the funding powers of the NHMF trustees. Under the first provision—that is, new section 3 of the 1980 Act—the trustees' powers will be

"exercisable in the case of things of any kind which are of scenic, historic, archaeological, aesthetic, architectural, engineering artistic or scientific interest".

We are confident that that catalogue—bearing in mind particularly the inclusion of historic, archaeological and scientific interest—can be wide enough to encompass anthropology and sociology.

A project relating to objects of anthropological or sociological interest would thus qualify for NHMF funding, provided—I emphasise this, as it was omitted from most if not all of the speeches so far—the trustees were satisfied that the project was of importance to the national heritage and of public benefit. Even under the existing legislation, the heritage lottery fund has already provided support for a number of museum projects where collections of local historical interest might be viewed as having a sociological emphasis. Examples include the local history collections at the Oxfordshire county museum and the ethnography collections at the Royal Albert Memorial museum in Exeter.

I would further direct the hon Lady's attention to the second provision in clause 1 of the Bill—that is, new section 3A of the 1980 Act. This gives the NHMF a new power to support certain projects that the trustees consider relate to an important aspect of the history, natural history or landscape of the United Kingdom and are of public benefit. The projects concerned cover public exhibitions, archive projects and comprehensive works of reference.

The aim of the new funding power is to enable the NHMF to help enhance understanding of the nation's history independently of its physical remains.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Is the Minister saying without any contradiction that the isle of Eigg could be purchased under the provisions of the heritage fund?

Mr. Sproat: It could be done if the trustees were convinced that it would be of public benefit and in the national interest, not the sociological or anthropological issues that the hon. Lady is seeking to insert into the Bill. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the NHMF and the heritage lottery fund work totally independently of Ministers. I understand that on legal advice they felt that there was a conflict between the public interest and the interest of the residents, and for that reason they declined to give the go-ahead to the bid.

Mr. Wilson: It is obviously a narrow and important point to define, but although the community interest and the public interest might not be synonymous terms, they are certainly not contradictory. If decisions by the trustees are made on the basis of language, it is important for the Minister to define those terms, particularly the use of the word "public". The definition may go beyond the community that is directly affected, so is it the local authority or, in the case of Eigg—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. That is a very long intervention. I think that the hon. Gentleman has made his point.

Mr. Sproat: It is a fair point. It is certainly true that the community interest and the national interest are not synonymous. It could be that on occasions they would not be in conflict, but as I understand it, on this occasion there was doubt that the crofters' interest was synonymous with the national interest. That was the

sticking point. It is up to the trustees of the NHMF and the heritage lottery fund to make a judgment based on their interpretation of that interest.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether I could give a sharper, clearer definition. The answer is no. It would require a legal, forensic use of language that I cannot guarantee to produce off the top of my head, and it would also vitiate the principle that the judgment must be made by the trustees. Having taken expert and legal advice, which is what they nearly always do, the trustees believe that there could be a conflict between the narrow but, in the view of Opposition Members, good interest of the crofters and the national interest. To answer the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question, the national heritage memorial fund would be looking for an access far more general than the community and the local authority area to which he referred.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: That narrow point is the nub of the matter. As the community interest had 50 per cent. representation on the trust board, potentially in future the community, the Scottish Wildlife trust and the Highland council could disagree. The decision was taken because the community was looking for 50 per cent. Had there been only 25 per cent. interest, it might have been okay. Is the Minister saying that any such application where the community is looking for 50 per cent. or more will always be ruled out?

Mr. Sproat: No. I would say neither that nor reducing it to 25 per cent. would guarantee that it would be acceptable. It would be up to the trustees to judge for themselves whether any percentage was benefiting a particular or sectional interest to the disbenefit of the national interest. That is a matter that the trustees must decide for themselves in the specific circumstances of any application. On this occasion, the 50 per cent. to which the hon. Lady referred was present, and they decided that it was not in the national interest.

I hope that, in the light of what I have said, the hon Lady will agree that the amendment she proposes would not serve the purpose that she seeks. Given that the list of heritage "interests" specified in new section 3 is already rather long, I would be most reluctant to extend it any further without good reason. The risk in adding further entries to the list is not just that it would become impossibly unwieldy but that the omission of any particular specialism might then be a source of misunderstanding and concern.

Ms Cunningham: I shall not add anything further, but I must insist on the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 99, Noes 169.

Division No. 83] **[7.27 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Alton, David
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Corston, Ms Jean
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dixon, Rt Hon Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Gunnell, John
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oliner, Bill
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walley, Ms Joan
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Brian
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Elfyn Llwyd and
Mr. Andrew Welsh.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Rowe, Andrew
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and
Mr. Sebastian Coe.

Question accordingly negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—[*Mr. Sproat.*]

7.38 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): In accordance with my hon. Friends on the Front Bench, I welcome the Bill as amended—or not as the case may be—but I want to say something about the trustees of the national heritage memorial fund, the way in which they are appointed and the powers that they will have under the Bill.

The Bill extends the trustees' areas of responsibility and gives them the ability to spend that much more money from the national heritage memorial fund, which amounts to about £280 million a year. I understand that they are not particularly good spenders. Indeed, they are among the slowest spenders. I think that the Secretary of State ought to look at the way in which the trustees' internal systems work.

I find the sort of people who are trustees annoying. Who are they? Where have they suddenly come from? They have effectively become the arbiters of taste; they will decide what particular moneys will be spent on what particular schemes. They all share the same value system. I do not see anyone from Forest Gate or the east end in this little lot, yet in large measure the money that has been raised from the national lottery, which goes into the national heritage memorial fund, comes from communities such as the one that I represent. Where is our input into the decision making?

The list of trustees includes Lord Rothschild, for example. I notice that there are at least four old Etonians among the trustees. Indeed, Eric Anderson is a former headmaster of Eton. I of course understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) might have some affinity with such individuals, but he knows that I love him dearly. Most of the trustees, if not all, came from public schools or were educated at one. What do they know about life in Forest Gate among ordinary working-class communities? Those people will be spending vast sums of money that are raised by the communities to which I have referred.

Does Lord Rothschild ever do the national lottery? He is as rich as Croesus, so I doubt very much that he does. In fact, someone said that Lord Rothschild could lose a winning lottery ticket and not even be upset. Sir Richard Carew Pole, another trustee, is a 13th baronet. We have lots of those in Newham; we are always falling over baronets as we go around the place. I notice in "Who's Who" that Sir Richard is described as a farmer and a daydreamer. I hope that he does not daydream when he is out on a tractor—of course, he would not be out on a tractor, because he is a gentleman farmer and would let someone else to do the dirty work.

Why should such people be making the decisions? Where is our input? They are all appointed by the Secretary of State. You can bet your life that a list of the great and good has been pushed forward and the Secretary of State has said, "Oh yes, I went to school with this one. Oh, he's a good chap." That is the way in which the system works. I find it obnoxious and unacceptable that the great and the good will decide exactly how our money will be spent. I want to know, for example, whether the Secretary of State or the Minister has considered getting some good working-class stock on the list. I am available—I did not go to public school.

The trustees' powers are being extended, so they will undoubtedly be looking round at the sort of things that their friends are interested in funding. That is what it amounts to; that is what will happen. They will decide what is to be considered national heritage. After all, the same people decided to give £13 million, or was it £14 million, of lottery money—when one is the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) and gets so much money, it does not really matter whether the amount is an extra £1 million or £2 million either way—to Churchill's scribbling, which I found thoroughly objectionable. They thought that, since it was the 50th anniversary of the end of the second world war, there would be great acclaim for such a decision; that people would take great pride in it;

that the working-class would be throwing their sweaty caps up in the air and saying, "Wow, what a great thing to be doing!" Suddenly, of course, the roof fell in because people thought that the decision was distasteful and the wrong way in which to spend lottery money.

I participate in the lottery every week—in fact, twice a week now. I would very much like to win. As I have said, I would fax from Mustique or wherever I happened to be my application for the Chiltern Hundreds when I won. I would not even bother to turn up. I object to these middle class and upper middle class public school boys and girls spending money that we raise in areas such as the east end. I want to ensure that they consider schemes in areas where they do not normally go, know nothing about and, frankly, do not care anything about.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central becomes the new Minister responsible for the arts, I hope that he will go through the lists of appointees and not show any affection for old Etonians merely because he is one of them. I hope that he will be cheerfully slitting throats. That is what we want in this place; we want a bit of red terror when the Labour Government come to power. I want Labour Ministers going through the lists of the great and the good, weeding out the Tories and all the friends of the Tories.

One of my hon. Friends raised the fact yesterday that so many Tories who are connected with companies that give £4 million to the Conservative party serve on quangos. That is corruption because it is patronage. I do not think that we should be prepared to allow it to happen with money that is effectively public money—money that has been raised in areas such as mine in the east end so that a bunch of middle-class tossers can decide how it should be spent.

I shall not oppose the Third Reading, but I hope that I have put on record my extreme distaste at the way in which people are selected by the Secretary of State and can decide how our money will be spent.

7.46 pm

Mr. Sproat): I should like to correct a minor inaccuracy in the tirade of vilification of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). The trustees are appointed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I say sincerely to the hon. Gentleman that, if he has any suitable names in mind for membership of any of the 50 quangos that we have to fill in the Department of National Heritage, I would be extremely interested to hear them. There is certainly no superfluity of excellent candidates, so if he can suggest anyone, whether from his constituency or elsewhere, I would genuinely like to hear about them.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister assure me that the trustees play the game with applications from Northern Ireland and Scotland?

Mr. Sproat: Yes.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Civil Procedure Bill [*Lords*]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Order for Third Reading read.

7.47 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Gary Streeter): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill prepares the way for an important set of reforms which will serve the civil justice system well into the future. It enables us to introduce wide-reaching changes which will ensure greater access to justice for all. We will introduce measures to ensure that going to court is quicker, cheaper and simpler—measures that will create a system that is focused on the needs of litigants.

High on our agenda is the establishment of a new civil procedure rule committee. A great deal of work will be necessary to ensure that we can produce a new code of rules that meets the needs of modern litigants. We realise the importance of recruiting the best possible candidates to serve on the new committee, and will proceed to initiate the necessary appointments process so that the committee can be up and running within the next few months.

The establishment of the Civil Justice Council is important to ensure that all those with an interest in the civil justice system can play their part in the reform process. Clearly, the reforms that we are introducing will have a significant impact on, and pose new challenges for, all those involved in the system. The Civil Justice Council will enable all groups to co-operate in the development of the reforms and ensure that they are prepared for the changes. We are firmly committed to carrying forward the reforms in partnership with all other participants in the system, and the council will provide a key forum for that. Our intention is for the council to be established by the summer, and our plans will be set out shortly.

Lord Woolf presented us with a blueprint for a dynamic civil justice system. He has done an outstanding job and deserves the gratitude of us all. The Government are working up the details of how to achieve the blueprint. In particular, the procedures necessary to support judicial case management—on the fast track and the multi-track—and the new costs regime need to be introduced carefully. We recognise the importance of consultation on the detail of the new procedural systems needed to ensure that cases are heard fairly and efficiently. In the next few months, we will meet interested bodies to discuss the procedures and will publish consultation papers later in the year. Our reforms go hand in hand with our major reforms of legal aid, which were announced last year.

The Government remain fully committed to the October 1998 deadline for the introduction of the main aspects of the reforms, and the steps I have just outlined are a testament to that. A detailed plan of action has been drawn up to ensure that we keep on track. We are determined that our vision of a faster, cheaper and simpler civil justice system will be delivered.

The debates in the House and in the other place have shown that our reforms have support from all quarters of society. I thank all hon. Members for their support and help in the Bill's progress through the House, especially the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng). The Government have proven that we place the highest value

[Mr. Gary Streeter]

on achieving access to justice for all, and creating a civil justice system of which we can continue to be proud and which will meet the needs of our citizens well into the 21st century.

7.52 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): We have supported the Bill in the other place, on the Floor of the House and in Committee. It will provide a context for the implementation of subsequent reforms. We are indebted for all the work that has gone into preparing and improving the Bill.

We welcome especially the creation of a Civil Justice Council, which will be an advisory body. Its function will be to promote the aims of the civil justice system and review its operation and development. For the first time, provision will be made for an input from the consumer of legal services, who all too often is forgotten in the development of our justice system. We welcome the fact that that will change, as a result of an amendment supported by Lord Irvine of Lairg in the other place. The important and significant voice of the consumer will be heard on the Civil Justice Council.

As we give the Bill a Third Reading, we should remember that access to justice demands that those who use our court system are not burdened by excessive fees. Many Labour Members are concerned by the recent imposition of excessive fees which are designed to make the civil justice system self-financing, but which will exclude many from access to it. We condemn the imposition of those increased fees, because it runs counter to the Government's stated objectives in introducing the Bill.

Nevertheless, we broadly welcome the Bill, because it provides the context for subsequent reform. That reform should be subjected to a rigorous cost-benefit analysis, because it is farcical to imagine that the reforms encapsulated in Lord Woolf's report, "Access to Justice Final Report", can be implemented without considerable cost to the Exchequer. The taxpayer will have to pay a price for implementation of the Woolf report. We have urged the Government to publish the figures and tell us how much implementation will cost, and we will continue to press them in the remaining weeks before the general election.

The Labour party welcomes the Bill, but we will review civil justice, including the legal aid system, as an early priority of the next Labour Government. Our priority is true access to justice; that cannot be achieved without a cost-benefit analysis, which is markedly lacking to date. With that warning to the Government, we welcome the Third Reading of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

Sex Offenders Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 2

REGISTER OF SEX OFFENDERS

'.—(1) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to maintain a register of the information supplied to the police under this Act, whether on the Police National Computer or otherwise.

(2) Nothing in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 shall prevent the retaining of details of a person on a register maintained under the provisions of this section.

(3) In this Act, "register" includes data stored (whether or not with other data) on a computer database from which the information to which subsection (1) above relates can be retrieved.'—*[Mr. Michael.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

7.56 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss new clause 3—*Use of information on the register of sex offenders*—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall, following consultation, make regulations in respect of—

(a) the means whereby information notified to the police under this Act is to be registered and maintained;

(b) those persons who may have access to information so notified; and

(c) the responsibilities of the police to provide information and to co-operate with others in using information so notified for the protection of the public, including, but not confined to, responsibilities for providing information and advice to members of the public and to statutory and voluntary bodies.

(2) In addition to any regulations made under subsection (1) above, the Secretary of State may, from time to time and following consultation, issue guidance on good practice concerning the use of information notified to the police under this Act in child protection activities, including activities undertaken by, or in collaboration with, local area child protection committees and others.

(3) Regulations made under subsection (1) above shall be laid before Parliament in draft and shall be subject to approval by a resolution of each House before being made.'

Mr. Michael: The new clauses address a gaping hole in the Bill. Two provisions are missing from the legislation. First, there is no provision for a paedophile register, which was promised when the Bill was announced in the Queen's Speech. Secondly, although the Bill specifies that offenders must notify their address or change of address to the police, it does not say what the police should do with the information.

We had some good debates in Committee, and I had hoped that Government amendments would be tabled to cover the deficiencies. I am disappointed that no such amendments have been tabled. Unless we get the Bill right, including the provisions in new clauses 2 and 3, we will leave children at risk. There is also a danger that we will leave the police at risk.

The Bill would require those who have been convicted of the offences specified in the Bill to register their addresses with the police, but it contains no system for

handling the information. New clause 2 would place a duty on the Home Secretary to maintain a register of the information supplied to the police under the Bill. We have fine-tuned our suggestions after the debates in Committee and discussions with police officers at all levels. The simplest way to introduce the register, without extra bureaucracy and cost and new software, is to include the information in the police national computer. New clause 2 would allow the information to be kept on the police national computer, and it is sufficiently flexible to deal with developments.

New clause 3 is needed to fill a gap in the Bill, by saying what should be done with the information when it is provided. There has been much debate concerning how information about the addresses of offenders, especially those who have been convicted of paedophile offences, should be dealt with. There is a problem in deciding whether it should be generally available, available only in specific circumstances, or retained as confidential, for the use of the police alone.

A variety of organisations hold the strong view that such procedures need to be part of a system directed at protecting children, which will ensure that the information gets to the places where it is needed in order to achieve that objective.

In Committee, we suggested a structure that would make that responsibility clear and, while requiring the Home Secretary to produce a code of practice, would also allow for informal advice. The view that is held in several quarters is clear. The chief constables, who have spoken to me and to my hon. Friends, and those who represent police officers say that, unless a structure is provided in the Bill, they could be left unprotected.

There are two ways in which that could come about. If information is handed to the police station, what is to be done with it? Yes, it may be fed into the police national computer. We suggest that structure in new clause 2. But should the information also be distributed more widely to members of the public?

The police could run into danger on two grounds. First, they could provide information that led to an individual becoming a target—perhaps an innocent person, as a result of mistaken identity. Events could flow from the fact that the police had made available information given to them under the Bill. That could lead to criticism and challenge, perhaps in a legal sense, and certainly by the public.

The second element of challenge could occur if the police did not provide information—if, for instance, information arose about the identity of an individual who might be in an area, especially in relation to informal contact with children, a contact less likely to be covered by the provisions of the Police Bill, which is also now under discussion in Parliament. If the police had not provided such information, they could be criticised for not having done so.

It seems to me that we are running away from those problems unless we put into the Bill a careful, but flexible, structure allowing for a balanced, reasoned and measured approach to this difficult and problematic area. That is why, in new clause 3, we suggest that there should be further consultation. We do not want to jump at it, which is why we made our suggestion in that particular form. Following that consultation, the Home Secretary should make regulations in respect of the provision of the information. Clearly, parallel arrangements for Scotland would also be needed.

We suggest that the regulations should involve not a code of practice but the minimum registration necessary to tie into the legislation a common-sense system and good practice in child protection. That is the way to avoid all the arguments of recent years about practices such as intrusive surveillance. There is nothing about that in legislation, so arguments have taken place on what the police are and are not entitled to do under the common law. That has built up into a major conflict, evidence of which we have seen recently in the House of Lords, the press and the other media—all because the problem had not been tackled at an earlier stage. It would be all the more sensible, therefore, for the House to recognise that there is something that needs to be dealt with, and to deal with it in a reasoned and measured way today.

The Home Secretary, following consultation, would put minimal regulations in place to cover the three points in subsection (1) of new clause 3, the first of which is:

"the means whereby information notified to the police under this Act is to be registered and maintained".

From the point of view of the police and all the professionals, as I believe the Minister has acknowledged in discussion, that would be done by holding the information in a systematic way on the police national computer.

Secondly, new clause 3(1) refers to

"those persons who may have access to information so notified".

That could be as simple as specifying the police and those whom the Home Secretary, on the advice of the police, has authorised to have access. The regulations do not need to be complicated.

Thirdly—

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Michael: May I finish this point first?

Thirdly, the new clause covers

"the responsibilities of the police to provide information and to co-operate with others in using information so notified for the protection of the public".

It describes those responsibilities as

"including, but not confined to, responsibilities for providing information and advice to members of the public and to statutory and voluntary bodies."

We refer to "advice and information", because information without advice can be dangerous. That is the reasoned way of approaching the problem.

We also allow for information to be provided to the statutory and voluntary bodies and to members of the public where appropriate. That adds up to a measured and rational approach to the ultimate objective of protecting children. Our aim is to provide a simple framework. I do not think that the regulations would need to go far beyond those words; perhaps those words are adequate in themselves.

[Mr. Michael]

Saying that the matter would be dealt with by regulation allows a period for consultation by the Home Secretary. The Association of Chief Police Officers wants to ensure that the regulations do not go too far and become binding and restrictive.

Sir Wyn Roberts *rose—*

Mr. Michael: If the right hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue, I am explaining the new clause. I shall certainly give way to him as soon as I have finished, but these things hang together.

That is all that would be contained in the regulations made under this part of the Bill. It would satisfy the desire of many who have spoken from the police side—to keep the requirements in the Bill simple—while allowing a hook in the legislation for the good practice and the protection of children that are our objectives.

Against that background, subsection (2) of new clause 3 says that, in addition to the regulations,

"the Secretary of State may, from time to time and following consultation, issue guidance on good practice concerning the use of information notified to the police under this Act in child protection activities, including activities undertaken by, or in collaboration with, local area child protection committees and others."

That means that the activity that chief constables, superintendents and the police in general wish to undertake—using the information for the protection of children—can be carried out in a flexible way, but still within the ambit of the Bill.

Having explained the intention of the new clause, I give way to the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts).

Sir Wyn Roberts: I believe that the hon. Gentleman is acknowledging that there is no easy ready-made answer to the problems that he has mentioned. But is he not mixing oil and water by prescribing both regulations and guidelines as to good practice? Surely we shall not know what good practice is until some time has elapsed.

Mr. Michael: I am surprised at the right hon. Gentleman's making that point, which is a weak one. First, it is because good practice will develop that it should be covered by guidance rather than in the regulations. That is precisely why we framed the new clause in that way.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman had responsibility in Wales in connection with the Children Act 1989, so he will know that that is precisely how that Act—I believe that he played some part in it—makes the distinction between requirements that need to be defined very simply and those that need to be dealt with sensibly, but in a structured way that recognises the need for co-operation between different agencies, which often work under different pieces of legislation.

I want to underline the simplicity of our proposal. There should be a hook in the legislation: a legislative basis for the good practice and co-operation that everyone working in this connection wants. Our proposals avoid the introduction of excessive legal requirements or complex statutory instruments and keep the system flexible while making clear the intention of Parliament that there will be a paedophile register and that it will be used to protect children. That is important, because neither of those points is made clear in the Bill.

I call in aid the fact that chief constables have said that they are not clear about their responsibilities and those of officers under their control as a result of the legislation. The decisions would not be about how information on the police national computer is dealt with, because that is not how the information reaches the police; it reaches them in the first instance by an offender who has been identified under the Bill coming into a police station and presenting his new address.

Unless we make it clear in the legislation that there is a system for handling that information, the Home Secretary may advise that it should be registered on the police national computer, but the police will also have to decide what their other responsibilities are under other statutes and in terms of the common law. I cannot understand why that point has not been accepted. Indeed, I thought that the Minister responded positively on it in Committee. I had expected him to come up with a new clause, one that might have been better than anything we could draft—although I cannot see anything wrong with the style and simplicity of our new clause.

The Police Federation is worried that its members may not be protected unless those issues are dealt with in the legislation. Advice from the Home Secretary and decisions by the chief constable on how to handle information may provide useful guidance much of the time, but they will not answer the question about individual responsibility, which may devolve to the sergeant on duty at the time that information is given, or to the inspector or superintendent. Individuals will have to take decisions, and if there is no guidance for them, and no system established through which they should operate, there will be a glaring hole in the Bill.

What are the expectations? The result of a survey of police forces in England and Wales undertaken by the chief constable of Gloucestershire was published recently. It shows that the Hampshire constabulary scheme—a multi-agency project between police, probation and social services, in which information is gathered on individuals and the risk assessed—provides information to local schools, for instance. The purpose is to raise awareness about specific issues that affect those schools and to ensure that information and advice on how to use it are available for those who have to deal with children.

The report makes it clear that there have been occasions on which the media and the public have obtained inaccurate information, leading to misunderstanding, anxiety and even violence. People may take different views about an offender being targeted, but we should surely be concerned about protecting innocent people. That is why it is important for there to be a sensible, ordered and accurate way of dealing with information.

There are other examples of the development of good practice. Merseyside and Lincolnshire are cited in the report as having well documented protocols. The Merseyside protocol covers the sharing of information; the assessment of risk; devising strategic plans to minimise risk; agreed implementation plans; and the monitoring and review of the way in which those systems work. That is logical and sensible. Risk assessment is the first step in protecting children. That is surely the basis of a sensible way of dealing with the matter.

It is curious that there is nothing in the Bill to ensure that information is dealt with in that way. The new clause would facilitate the reasoned, sensible and rational approach that has been exemplified by the practice of several police forces.

8.15 pm

The report by Mr. Butler, the chief constable of Gloucestershire, also raises legal points about the Data Protection Act 1988 and the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, and civil liberties are without doubt a major concern for all forces. It says:

"At the moment there is conflicting legal advice on whether disclosing information to the public is illegal."

It also says that some forces have been advised that it is, and others that it is not. On the basis of what is legal, forces have to decide what is responsible and what is their duty.

The report says:

"The Data Protection Act allows for the disclosure of information to 'prevent a crime', however, one force suggests that it is unlawful to have a policy which utilises this provision in every case. It is a fine line of assessment and due consideration must be given to each individual case."

We want something in the Bill to ensure that precisely such consideration can be given.

The report's conclusion is important:

"Any warning system must form part of the overall strategy for managing the risk by paedophiles. The aims must be to facilitate information sharing, ongoing risk assessment and a variety of measures, preventative, proactive, investigative, tailored to specific circumstances. Positive steps must be taken at an early stage to track and control the activities of paedophiles, particularly predatory offenders. Any warning system needs to 'follow the offender' and be reassessed and updated as necessary. Decisions should be made on a multi agency basis following documented guidelines, taking into account all the issues raised in this report."

I do not see how the legislation can be adequate unless it allows those recommendations to be implemented. The new clauses would do precisely that.

Other comments have been made by a variety of organisations. The Police Superintendents Association of England and Wales expressed concern about the effects on general disclosure and highlighted the difficulties that can arise from it, underlining the need for the continuation and development of present inter-agency arrangements, although it went on to say that it might be useful to develop guidance in the light of experience, once the legislation is enacted. That is precisely what the new clauses are designed to do. The association refers to increasing international travel and communication and repeats its view about the need to consider a European database of paedophiles and their movements.

The Association of Chief Police Officers issued a helpful statement. It said:

"In our view, the way forward, based on existing good police practice across the country is for:

proper co-ordinated risk assessment of each case, in conjunction with Social Services, Probation and other agencies where appropriate including, for example, Education Authorities."

The new clauses would allow information and advice to be made available to agencies, voluntary organisations and, where appropriate, members of the public, in a flexible system that allows for guidance and the development of best practice.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, on behalf of the Children's Charities Consortium, underlined the difficulties. It said:

"At present, the Bill does not include a mechanism for continuing registration of an individual where it is considered there is a continuing risk to children."

It also pointed out that the Bill does not deal with the need for

"an interface of this register with other registers which record information"

and that, because of the Bill's sensitivities and the need for thorough working, it should include an inbuilt review process. We debated that matter in Committee, and I consider it necessary, but it has not been included. That makes it all the more important that we have a system of guidance from the Home Secretary, based on advice and consultation, as we have suggested.

The NSPCC report—it is interesting that such statements come from organisations that are concerned first and foremost with the protection of children—continued:

"The information . . . must be of actual use in protecting children and may benefit from the inclusion of a 'domestic profile' to help combat registration of mere postal addresses."

We are addressing the handling of all that information in a co-operative framework.

The report—again, it is important to note that this is the view of those whose prime concern is the protection of children—continued:

"Open public access to a similar register in the United States has sometimes led to incidents of vigilantism that may merely encourage a 'registered' sex offender to disappear."

The report stated:

"there must be a process in place that will control how information is used"

to make sure that it is used properly. It concluded:

"In short, the Consortium supports the intentions behind the Bill but feel strongly that it must be co-ordinated with other measures."

The report argued strongly:

"The Sex Offenders Bill is not a 'magic wand' but can play a part in what needs to be a sophisticated, co-ordinated and workable response to those that seek to harm our children."

The new clauses are based on our conversations with organisations that believe that we need to do much more to protect children and want a paedophile register that works, but appreciate the sensitivities that the police and child protection organisations must show. We have designed proposals that will tie simply into legislation a measure to allow a flexible response based on risk and the protection of children. I commend the new clauses, which I am convinced will make the Bill effective legislation for the protection of children. Without such changes, there will be a black hole at its heart. Further legislation will be needed to fill the gap, and we shall all regret not having amended the Bill when we had the opportunity.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): I support the calls for a code of good practice. The issue must be addressed because it lies at the heart of the Bill. I am surprised that the Government have not tabled an amendment; in Committee, they suggested that they might.

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

I support the excellent and strong arguments of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). I do not understand how we can leave such a provision out. The Government have not made a sufficient contribution to the debate. Although the Bill calls for changes of address to be notified, it does not say what should be done with the information. We must know more about the reasons for keeping addresses. Registers and databases protect no one; it is what is done with them that will protect children. There must be guidance and direction to the police on what decisions and action should follow from the knowledge that they are given by the new notification requirements.

I agree with the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth that the use to which the register will be put must be carefully controlled so that it is primarily used in the prevention of crime and not open to abuse that leads to vigilante victimisation of offenders and their families—as happened in the tragic case in Manchester, reported at the weekend, in which an innocent pensioner was mistaken for a child abuser whose name and photograph had appeared in the *Manchester Evening News*. Notification must not be regarded as an additional punishment, but as a preventive measure. Information should be made available to other Government Departments and bodies that already keep lists to protect children.

The answer to a question that I asked about the number of names on the paedophile intelligence database held by the National Criminal Intelligence Service reveals that about 25,000 known or suspected paedophiles are on its list. That is one of six lists held by Government and public bodies. We do not know the number of names on the Department of Health consultancy service index or the Department of Education's list 99. Obviously, we are dealing with a large number. We know from another question answered by the Government that some 100,000 paedophiles are at large in the community. All that information should be properly assembled.

It is amazing that the word "register" is omitted from the Bill. In public parlance, it is known as the paedophile Bill and it is generally believed that a register will be kept. The Bill does not mention one; it is as if there were no such thing.

The publicity surrounding the Bill has raised expectations, with calls for the introduction of an American-style Megan's law, whereby there would be public notification when a paedophile moves into an area. I urge that we do not go down that path. We should provide a coherent framework of who should be notified and in what circumstances. Area child protection committees should be informed and have access to information on paedophiles when they feel that it is necessary in their work. If we do not make things properly clear, I fear that we will find that we have a Megan's law in practice, if not in theory.

There has been private publication of the names of offenders in Australia and New Zealand, and there is talk of a similar list being produced in Britain. That would be against the law on the rehabilitation of offenders, and it would be bound to be full of errors that could lead to innocent people being attacked. The Bill's purpose is to protect children, but it could end up having the exactly opposite effect—innocent children and families could become the targets of arson attacks, as has happened in the past because the Government have not grasped the nettle and said how the police should act.

I support what has been said about the view of the police: that they need strong guidance so that they can work with discretion, but within carefully laid down limits so that they know where they stand. Even if the Government have not been able to table amendments in this House, I hope that they will say that, before proceedings on the Bill finish in another place, a Government amendment will be tabled to give proper attention to the matter. In the meantime, I support the new clauses.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): Like the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), I support the new clause moved so effectively by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). The right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) was right: there are no simple solutions to some of the problems.

The new clauses are important because they are reasonable and sensible and would strengthen the Bill by focusing it more closely on the central issue: how better to protect children in particular, and the public, from the predatory and criminal instincts of serial child sex offenders. That is what we must consider tonight. The Bill, though a significant step forward, fails to address the matter coherently.

I, too, have seen the Association of Chief Police Officers survey, which was deposited in the Library today. It makes fascinating reading. Perhaps the Minister will explain what the Government intend to do about the existing practice of police forces in revealing information to local people, area child protection committees and other organisations about the whereabouts of known child sex offenders. That is clearly happening already, but it is happening without the benefit of a statutory framework to regulate the release of such information to the public and other organisations. That is not satisfactory, and I am sure that the Government do not regard it as satisfactory. The survey mentioned 14 police forces that admit that they release such information. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth said, a police force that releases such information risks civil action on several grounds. That is not acceptable.

I strongly support new clause 3 because it focuses on the Bill's central issue, the protection of children. The key principle recognised in new clause 3 is that there may be some circumstances in which it will be appropriate for the police carefully and sensitively to notify the public of the whereabouts of a serious paedophile offender.

Although the issues are complex, and range from protecting important civil liberties and the principle of rehabilitating child sex offenders wherever possible to the role of the media, the issue on which we should focus is how to protect children. If we were honest with ourselves and asked whether, as parents, we would want to be told if a serious child sex offender had moved into our neighbourhood, the answer would be yes. The ACPO survey reflects the fact that we might then be better able to protect our children from the criminal instincts of child sex offenders.

If, as parents, we would want that information at our disposal so that we could look after our children as they played in local streets and parks, the Bill must provide for

it. If it does not, its principle and effect will be undermined; its purpose will be weakened and its focus will be disjointed. That would be in no one's interests, which is why many Opposition Members are surprised that the Government have not indicated their intention to legislate to ensure that the Bill covers that important issue.

I hope that the Minister will say something more positive when he winds up the debate tonight. This is an important issue and we cannot run away from it. Our constituents who are parents would want this information at their disposal, and we must reflect their wish in a sensible way. Like the hon. Member for Bolton, North–East, I strongly oppose the more public disclosure of information, such as we have seen in some countries. The information must be disclosed carefully.

The use of leaflets, flyers and newspapers printing photographs and names and addresses is not the way to proceed. I am interested to note that the ACPO survey reflected police concern about that practice. It is clear from the survey of police forces around the country that most police forces believe that the controlled and sensible release of information about the whereabouts of child sex offenders may reduce their offending profile, which means that our children would be better protected. For me, that is the only issue.

8.30 pm

If there is a role for the controlled release of information to certain members of the public, particularly parents and relevant organisations, it should be recognised in the Bill, because it is the best way forward. We cannot pretend that the problem will go away, or that we can sit on the huge register of information that the Bill will collect if we do not set out in the Bill how the use of that information to protect the public is to be regulated.

I hope that the Minister will say something positive about these sensible and reasonable new clauses. We are used to being told that there is some technical deficiency in our amendments. The Minister may have some technical concerns about the drafting of the new clauses, but that is a secondary issue. The important issue is the principle of wider community or public notification of the whereabouts of sex offenders. There is huge popular support in the country for giving parents in such serious situations the right to know the whereabouts of child sex offenders. If it is done sensibly, having discussed the issue with the chief constable and interested organisations, it is the road that we should take.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): New clauses 2 and 3 lie at the heart of the Bill. I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham) about Megan's law and what could happen in terms of vigilante action if we take that route.

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Clapham: I am pleased to see the Minister nod. I have the impression that he has taken that point on board. It is important to have an effective interface between the register and people working in the community to protect children. The Minister will be aware that, in most areas, child protection teams work closely with the police to ensure that section 1 offenders are closely monitored. Whenever a section 1 offender appears in a new area, the police either inform social services or vice versa. In that way, the necessary protection is provided in the area covered by that child protection team and police force. We could use that model to ensure that the information on the register is applied effectively.

If social services, who have the register, are informed by the police that a section 1 offender has moved into their area, they already ensure that the register is made available to probation officers and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The voluntary sector can then work together to ensure that it can effectively protect children in a community. That is the way to proceed.

If we were to decide that informing the public would be the best way to proceed, the result could be mob rule. There are plenty of examples of that. We have read this week of examples in Manchester, Stirling and the midlands. We must avoid that route. Last week, an article in *The Independent* suggested that the Home Secretary may be thinking about divulging the names of paedophiles to the community. That would be the wrong way to proceed. We must use the route that is already established. The interface must be with social services; the link must be with the voluntary services, the NSPCC and probation officers, who work with social services.

It is important that the Minister should say how we shall use the register effectively to inform the community generally, but in a sensitive way so that we do not create the over-reaction that we have already experienced. We must ensure that it is an effective way to protect children in the community.

In Committee, I described the horrific constituency case of a young woman who lost her first husband and formed a relationship that led to marriage with a second man, only to find that the marriage had taken place because the man wanted to get to the children. If we ensure that the register works as I have described, such cases would not occur. When the man moved into the area, social services would have been informed by the police and monitored him to ensure that he did not come into contact with children and was no danger to them. Had the woman wished to proceed with the marriage, social services would have informed her about the man's past. That would have protected those children adequately without informing the public and creating the mob rule that we have read about this week. I shall be interested to hear the Minister's response.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle–under–Lyme): The Bill must be of use in protecting children, or it is worth nothing. I have sat through many Criminal Justice Bills in which we have returned repeatedly, when dealing with children and child abuse, to adjust and correct previous legislation. It has taken us years to make progress because we did not get it right the first time.

I ask the Minister to consider these two new clauses seriously, especially new clause 3, because it would save our returning to the issue time after time after time. I do not want to do that, so I ask the Minister to consider the matter very seriously and give the new clause his support.

Mr. Kirkhope: This has been a very useful debate; it follows a debate that we had in Committee and discussions in which I have participated to try to find a solution to these matters.

[Mr. Kirkhope]

I shall discuss new clause 2 before I come to the main meat of the matter. In earlier debates on the Bill, I have made it clear that I do not believe that there is a need to create a separate register of sex offender information acquired under the Bill. As I told the Committee, the information that will be collected will be stored on the Phoenix database on the police national computer, and it will be instantly accessible by all forces and by the National Criminal Intelligence Service. It is not intended to create a separate register, although it has been convenient to talk in terms of a register when discussing the Bill's purposes.

I am not sure what placing a duty on the Secretary of State would achieve. The police already store information on offenders, including sex offenders, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) knows. The Bill will enable the police to hold up-to-date addresses on convicted sex offenders. We have discussed the uses to which that information might be put, and I have no doubt that the police will develop strategies for ensuring that those officers who need to be aware of it are aware of it.

In my submission, it is unnecessary to place a statutory duty on the Secretary of State, and I hope that in due course the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth will be able to withdraw the new clause.

Mr. Michael *rose—*

Mr. Kirkhope: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop my arguments to cover new clause 3, because the arguments relating to the two new clauses are linked. He may want to intervene later.

I have listened very carefully to the hon. Gentleman's explanation of the case for new clause 3, as I have listened with enormous care in Committee and earlier tonight to other hon. Members who have spoken. There is nothing between us in our desire that the police should make the best possible use of the information that will become available to them under the Bill, or in our recognition that such use must be careful and responsible. I agree with the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) that use must be responsible.

I note that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth has adjusted his approach since we last considered these matters in Committee—he knows that we have discussed them since then—but I remain unhappy about the approach that he proposes in these two new clauses. We need to clear up many points.

The police already share information with those who need to be aware of it—head teachers, school governors, social services departments and so on. There is no reason to believe that the operational case for such sharing in appropriate circumstances is not fully recognised by the police, and there is no legal barrier to it—for example, under data protection legislation—when such disclosures take place for the purpose that we are discussing; the prevention or detection of crime.

The police have also, very occasionally, and with due caution, disclosed information to individuals. I emphasise that they have done so cautiously, for all the reasons that were fully explained by the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone and me in Committee.

There is the danger of vigilantism, and some tragic cases have reminded us that, when individuals take the law into their own hands, the wholly innocent sometimes get hurt. There is also the danger of polluting evidence, so that the sex offender who offends again escapes justice because of the difficulty of receiving a fair trial. There is the danger that, if we prevent the offender from rehabilitating himself, we heighten the risk of further offences. There is the danger of driving the offender underground by providing such a massive disincentive to registration under the Bill that the police lose sight of the people with whom they need to keep in closest contact.

Those are all sound reasons for caution, which were mentioned in Committee and earlier in tonight's debate. I argue that the police do not need a provision in the Bill to encourage or allow them to share information, or a provision to warn them of the need for caution. I do not believe that we need the first part of new clause 3, which would not advance us beyond the present position unless we were to go substantially further and effectively deal with some of the more detailed—and far more difficult—issues which lie behind the second part of the new clause.

Subsection (2) of new clause 3 is about guidance to the police on the type of situation in which the police my decide to use the powers they already have to share information. As I have said previously, I fully accept that guidance in that area may prove necessary; but I believe that it is premature to consider the precise form that it must take.

Leading police officers have told us—I believe that they are absolutely right—that any developments in warning systems must form part of an overall strategy for managing the risk posed by paedophiles. They have argued that this needs to cover information sharing between agencies—hon. Members have referred to the need to develop such co-ordination—on-going risk assessment and a variety of preventive and investigative measures, tailored to the specific circumstances of each case. I believe that they are absolutely correct.

In Committee, I undertook to consider the suggestion that the Bill should contain powers for the Secretary of State to issue a code of practice. I have considered it extremely carefully, and discussions have taken place to discover what might be done to fulfil the obligation that I undertook in Committee. On full and further reflection, and in the light of the arguments that the police have made to us, I have decided that that would not be appropriate, but that we should respond to the police invitation for the development of a broader strategy. That suggests that we need to consider with the police and the other relevant agencies, in the light of current practice throughout the country, what form such a strategy might take. It would have to build on the substantial advances that have been made in inter-agency co-operation to counter child abuse.

I remind the House of my commitment made at Stockholm last summer. The Stockholm conference showed that the success of the Children Act 1989 and our genuine multi-agency, co-operative approach were proving to be a model for the rest of the world.

Mr. Thurnham: The hon. Gentleman spoke about the important part that voluntary agencies can play. I wonder whether he was aware that the NSPCC intends to issue a booklet tomorrow, giving advice to parents and others as to what action to take if a paedophile moves into their

area. I hope that he will welcome it and commend the NSPCC on the part that it has played. The NSPCC says that much stronger and more practical guidance needs to be given to everyone concerned.

8.45 pm

Mr. Kirkhope: I am not aware of the details of that booklet, but the NSPCC has been extremely positive and helpful, not only when we went to Stockholm, but in its general attitude to the need to tackle child abuse. It shows why it is necessary to be cautious in discussing the new clauses.

Inter-agency co-operation does not preclude the idea of guidance, or a code of practice, at some date, and we shall return to the idea if it appears appropriate, although we are mindful of the view of the Association of Chief Police Officers that a Home Office circular is likely to provide a better and more flexible way to proceed.

This is a difficult and sensitive area. I shall take an example of the type of difficult and sensitive situation that any guidance may have to address. It is not difficult to think of cases in which parents of young children might argue that they have a right to know of the offending history of an individual who has been housed near them. The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone mentioned that point. We may have considerable sympathy with those parents, but it is clear in many such situations that, rather than disclosing information, with all the fear and possible violence that might follow, it may be better for the offender to be housed in another locality, perhaps away from schools or young families. It may, however, be a case where the authorities have no influence over the locality in which the offender chooses to live, but where there is reasonable confidence that offending will not recur, provided that the individual is not ostracised or isolated.

Those are the sorts of difficult practical situations that may well arise, where careful—probably inter-agency—decisions would need to be taken. Any guidance that might be issued should allow the fullest possible flexibility in responding to the circumstances of individual cases, such as the example that I have just given, and not constrain the police or anyone else in trying to reach the best operational decisions.

Mr. Hutton: I am grateful to the Minister for his courtesy in giving way. Does he accept the principle that there may be circumstances in which the public should be informed of the whereabouts of a serious child sex offender?

Mr. Kirkhope: I have already told the House that, if it were treated in a cautious and sensitive manner, such a situation might arise, but I am nervous about the hon. Gentleman's reference to the public. I have given examples where the police, acting cautiously and sensitively, provided such information to an individual member of the public, or perhaps one or two members of the public. It is a complex matter, which is why I am in difficulties over the new clauses, worthy though their intent may be.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We fully appreciate the difficulties that my hon. Friend describes. Will he take it from me that there is widespread public concern about the timing of the implementation of the measure? Can he reassure us by saying when the strategy that he has described, and other developments that might follow the passage of the Bill, will be implemented?

Mr. Kirkhope: We are extremely anxious for the legislation to be on the statute book and operating as soon as possible. With the requirements that it places on sex offenders, it will be of enormous help to the public. There is a clear case for the Bill, which we will try to get through as soon as possible, with the help of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth.

I have outlined the way in which we intend to take matters forward. I cannot go further this evening. I have made our position clear to the hon. Gentleman and I hope that, in the interests of such an important measure, he will not press the new clause.

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to the Minister for his response. There is no difference between us on the need for the information to be dealt with in a way that allows it to be used effectively for the purpose that Parliament intends.

The Minister has engaged with the issues personally, and taken seriously the points made in Committee. I know that he has gone into the issues more fully following the Committee stage. There is no suggestion that he has not taken the debate seriously or that he has failed to take seriously his responsibility to move forward.

The Minister said that the police "share information"—I quote his words—but the information does not have to be notified to the police. After the passage of the Bill, after people who have committed offences specified in the Bill have been sentenced, they will have to report to the police their address or addresses and any subsequent change of address. The Bill, however, does not state what is to be done with that information. That is the problem.

Much of the Minister's speech will read as a speech in favour of new clause 3. He says that his view is based on advice from the police that the way forward is consideration with the police of a strategy to protect children. We agree with that. The new clause makes provision for that and links the information that will be provided under the Bill with the development of such a strategy.

Mr. Kirkhope: The point about the police is important. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that we should do everything that we can to assist the police in such difficult work. Will he accept that, in our discussions with chief police officers, they have made it clear that they do not want a code of practice in the form that the hon. Gentleman suggests?

Mr. Michael: I do not think the view expressed by chief police officers is so clear. They have made it clear that they do not want a code of practice, but may I point out to the Minister that he is referring to the amendment in Committee, not to the new clause. The new clause does not require a code of practice; it requires a hook in the Bill, followed by the issuing of guidance based on the pattern of consultation, discussion and development of good practice for which the Minister was arguing.

Mr. Kirkhope: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is taking that position. In a letter on behalf of ACPO, the ACPO crime committee states that its position

"would be to maintain maximum flexibility in the arrangements for exchanging and using information but, at the same time, to take an early opportunity to consider seeking national guidance on some limited areas. To achieve this goal, it is believed that the mechanism of a Home Office Circular would be the most effective option."

The crime committee makes it clear that those considerations are not easily achieved through a code of practice.

Mr. Michael: Indeed. The letter to which the Minister refers was sent to him and copied to me as a result of our debates in Committee. That is why the new clause does not include reference to a code of practice. It allows for guidance to be given through a circular from the Home Secretary. It meets the requirements of the letter, which does not refer to our new clauses, as I have pointed out in discussion with the president of ACPO and the chairman of the crime committee, who wrote the letter.

Mr. Kirkhope: The hon. Gentleman will have heard what I said about the way in which matters might develop in due course—on a broad basis, we might examine inter-agency co-operation and so on. Does he accept that that is a clear position, from our point of view?

Mr. Michael: It is a clear position, from the Minister's point of view, and nothing prevents that approach being taken if our new clause is accepted. The new clause allows specifically for that form of guidance and for the development of good practice. It allows for inter-agency working and for the flexibility that ACPO wants. It also deals with the concerns of the superintendents and the Police Federation that their members may not be protected unless there is provision such as new clause 3 makes.

I take the Minister's point that new clause 2 gives a power that the Home Secretary already has. I also take it that information will be handled in the way that we sought in new clause 2. The problem is that the Bill has a big hole in it. It requires information to be notified to the police, but does not state what the police are supposed to do with it. The new clause does not contradict anything that the Minister has said, but the Bill must specify how the information is to be used.

As I see it, it is not enough to deal with the matter simply through Home Office circulars or through informal advice. That advice and guidance must be hooked into the Bill or we shall face all the problems associated with the arguments about intrusive surveillance: long and complicated debate about the powers and responsibilities of the police and arguments about the powers of the Home Secretary, followed by legislation to clarify the matter and, I suggest, a much less flexible arrangement than would be allowed if my new clauses were agreed.

I accept that it is possible to establish a register—as suggested in new clause 2—without the new clause. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 3

USE OF INFORMATION ON THE REGISTER OF SEX OFFENDERS

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall, following consultation, make regulations in respect of—

(a) the means whereby information notified to the police under this Act is to be registered and maintained;

(b) those persons who may have access to information so notified; and

(c) the responsibilities of the police to provide information and to co-operate with others in using information so notified for the protection of the public, including, but not confined to, responsibilities for providing information and advice to members of the public and to statutory and voluntary bodies.

(2) In addition to any regulations made under subsection (1) above, the Secretary of State may, from time to time and following consultation, issue guidance on good practice concerning the use of information notified to the police under this Act in child protection activities, including activities undertaken by, or in collaboration with, local area child protection committees and others.

(3) Regulations made under subsection (1) above shall be laid before Parliament in draft and shall be subject to approval by a resolution of each House before being made.'—*[Mr. Michael.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 96, Noes 155.

Division No. 84] **[8.59 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew F
Betts, Clive
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Corston, Ms Jean
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dixon, Rt Hon Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
O'Neill, Martin
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L

Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Tyler, Paul
Walley, Ms Joan
Wigley, Dafydd
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Jane Kennedy and
Mr. Kevin Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Sir Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horder, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Moate, Sir Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Rowe, Andrew
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin and
Mr. Matthew Carrington.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 2

EFFECT OF NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Mr. Michael: I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 3, line 22, leave out 'before' and insert

'as soon as is practicable and in any event no later than'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 14, in page 3, line 27, at end insert

'or, where he also uses one or more other addresses, each of those addresses.'.

Amendment No. 15, in page 3, line 28, leave out 'before' and insert

'as soon as is practicable and in any event no later than'.

Government amendments Nos. 40 and 41.

Amendment No. 16, in page 3, line 32, at end insert 'or addresses'.

Government amendment No. 42.

Amendment No. 17, in page 4, leave out line 3.

Amendment No. 18, in page 4, line 7, leave out 'or'.

Amendment No. 19, in page 4, line 8, at end insert—

'; or

(c) if he lives or intends to live abroad, by sending a written notification of his decision to live abroad and his home address or addresses to a police station in his local police area or, in the case of a person who is living abroad, in the local police area in the United Kingdom in which he last lived.'

Amendment No. 20, in page 4, line 14, leave out 'in the United Kingdom'.

Amendment No. 21, in page 4, line 18, at end insert

'or, if he lives abroad, the police area in which his last home in the United Kingdom was situated.

Government amendment No. 43.

Mr. Michael: Amendment No. 13 deals with the question of how quickly information about an offender's address or change of address should be notified. The Bill allows 14 days, but in some circumstances, especially if the offender is devious and dangerous, 14 days is a

[Mr. Michael]

considerable time. That is why we suggest that the wording in the Bill should be replaced by the words

"as soon as is practicable and in any event no later than"

14 days.

Amendment No. 14 would require an offender to notify each of his addresses if he uses more than one, rather than just a home address. The other amendments follow that logic.

Amendment No. 41 would place a requirement on offenders who live abroad. I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, amendment No. 41 is the Government amendment that deals with that issue, although not in a totally satisfactory way. Our amendment No. 17 deals with people who live part of the time in this country and part of the time abroad, and would require notification so as to keep track of their circumstances, especially when other members of the family or extended families are involved in both homes. That important area is not covered in the Bill.

Amendment No. 19 would make provision for those who live abroad all the time or part of the time. We suggest that, if an offender lives or intends to live abroad, he should meet the requirements of the Bill

"by sending a written notification of his decision to live abroad and his home address or addresses to a police station in his local police area or, in the case of a person who is living only abroad, in the police area in the United Kingdom in which he last lived."

The amendment gives a sensible, commonsense definition of what an individual would have to do, but avoids the gap in the treatment of offenders that would be created if offenders who moved abroad did not have to notify the police of their address. It provides sufficient flexibility so that responsibility can be placed on the offender. If someone moves abroad and does not return, failure to notify is not a problem. The amendment places the onus on the offender, and puts a residual power in the hands of the police should someone move abroad and then move backwards and forwards without due respect for the provisions of the Bill and the requirements placed on him as a result of his committing an offence that is identified in the schedules. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Kirkhope: I sympathise with the desire of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) for the police to have up-to-date information at the earliest possible opportunity, which I believe is being sought in amendments Nos 13 and 15. I do not, however, believe that that approach would work in practice. What would be the earliest practical moment is a highly uncertain basis for the establishment of a criminal offence. It would put a burden on the courts to decide whether it would have been practicable for an offender to register sooner than he did, even if he registered within the 14-day limit. I do not believe that we should give the courts, the police or the prosecutors such an uncertain issue to decide, or make criminal liability dependent on that outcome. Fourteen days is a reasonable time; it is not excessive, and the public would not be provided with any further protection through the proposed changes.

9.15 pm

Nor do I believe that the requirement in amendments Nos. 14 and 16 to register all addresses that an offender visits—even for a period of one night—is practical. The police would be swamped with too much information. Moreover, I am not sure what the point is of recording an address that the offender has visited once and may never visit again. Nevertheless, I recognise the concern expressed in Committee that focusing the registration requirements solely on the offender's main residence might be insufficient.

I have already said that we cannot attach registration to every address that an offender visits, but we have decided to extend the registration requirement to any other address at which an offender spends 14 days or more in any 12-month period. That is the basis of our amendments. Such a measure will catch both long periods away from home at a single address—such as away-from-home working and holiday periods—and regular visits to another address for shorter periods which have a cumulative effect. Our proposals are contained in amendments Nos. 40 to 43.

Amendments Nos. 17 to 21, which seek to place offenders under an obligation to report overseas addresses, suffer from the same difficulties of impracticality and enforcement as the other amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) in respect of notifying addresses. We debated whether that would be possible at an earlier stage, and I made it clear then that, because the police would have no basis on which to determine whether an offence had been committed, they would not be able to prove where an offender had been when he was abroad. The matter has been carefully considered, but I am afraid that I do not see any way in which we can impose a registration requirement on those who leave, or have left, the United Kingdom. I invite the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Michael: I am disappointed by the Minister's response to what I felt were constructive amendments, but I do not intend to delay the House by pressing the matter further. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made: No. 40, in page 3, leave out line 31 and insert 'this section;'.

No. 41, in page 3, line 32, at end insert

'or

(c) his having resided or stayed, for a qualifying period, at any premises in the United Kingdom the address of which has not been notified to the police under this section,'.

No. 42, in page 3, line 33, leave out

'or, as the case may be, the effect of that change'

and insert

', the effect of that change or, as the case may be, the address of those premises'.

No. 43, in page 4, line 18, at end insert—

' "qualifying period" means—

(a) a period of 14 days; or

(b) two or more periods, in any period of 12 months, which (taken together) amount to 14 days.'—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Clause 4

YOUNG SEX OFFENDERS

Mr. Thurnham: I beg to move amendment No. 8, in page 5, line 18, at end insert—

'(1A) Subject to subsection (1B) below, this Part does not apply to a person who is under 16 on the relevant date.

(1B) In the case of a person falling within section 1(1)(a) or (b) above who is under 16 on the relevant date, the court may direct that this Part shall have effect.'.

This important amendment deals with whether children should be required to register. It amends the Bill so that notification requirements would not apply to a person aged under 16 unless the court directed otherwise. It is important because it affects sentencing, treatment and rehabilitation of children who have committed a criminal offence and, moreover, are themselves in need. It also highlights the complications involved in sex abuse by young offenders, and forces us to approach the problem of paedophiles realistically rather than in black-and-white terms of victims and monsters.

We are talking about people who are required to register, but who themselves are probably the victims. Approximately 50 per cent. of those who abuse children were abused themselves, and many of the young offenders we are discussing are still being abused by the adults around them. Recent scandals of paedophile rings in local authority care homes in Wales and Cheshire have shown the appalling prevalence of such situations. I was disturbed to learn the other day that a young constituent of mine was in one of the homes in Cheshire.

Any child who is in care should be looked after properly. The last thing that should happen is that they should be subject to abuse when they are supposed to be in care. Children who are suffering abuse can all too easily get mixed up in paedophile networks, abusing younger children because they think that it is the normal thing to do. The Bill is all about the protection of children, and child offenders should be treated separately from adult offenders. People involved in the treatment of young sex offenders, notably the National Association for the Development of Work with Sex Offenders and the Association of Chief Officers of Probation have both stressed that they do not believe that inclusion on a register is appropriate for children.

Also, the Childrens Charities Consortium—the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Childline, the National Children's Home Action for Children, Barnardo's, Save the Children Fund, the National Children's Bureau, and the National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations—for which the protection of the victims of sexual abuse is the highest priority, has expressed extreme disappointment that the Government have included young offenders in the Bill because there are more appropriate ways in which to deal with child offenders, and extra stigmatisation could be detrimental to a child's chances of rehabilitation.

Young child sex offenders highlight the importance of appropriate treatment procedures and full rehabilitation. I was extremely disturbed during the Second Reading debate at the lack of knowledge of the success of treatment programmes in dramatically reducing reoffending rates. If we want seriously to tackle the possibility of offenders reoffending—the issue at the heart of the Bill—we must look to proper treatment programmes.

Home Office research gives indisputable evidence of the effectiveness of treatment programmes, with an average 40 per cent. reduction in reoffending rates following the STEP programme—the sex offender treatment evaluation project. I was disappointed that the Home Office publication, dated 1994, is out of print. I asked for a copy of it. When I saw the Minister of State, Home Office, who is responsible for prisons, she indicated that she would let me have one. I never received it and I have had to borrow a copy from Don Finlater, who runs the excellent treatment programme at the Wolvercote clinic, directed by the Faithfull Foundation. The clinic has similar effectiveness. It is scandalous that the Department of Health has no plans for relocation of Wolvercote after selling off the present site.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department may be interested to know that on Monday I visited Ashworth special hospital and understood that it might be possible to find room on the Ashworth site for the location of a paedophile treatment centre. Therefore, if the Government are interested in providing residential treatment, that would be one possible site. Obviously, there would not be any requirement for planning permission.

If the Government view protection of children from sex offenders as a priority, they must make treatment a priority. If sex offenders are going to be released from prison once they have served their sentence, it is vital that we do all we can to ensure that they do not reoffend. Some members of the Children's Charities Consortium, for example the NSPCC and Barnardo's, have direct experience of working with young sex offenders through their treatment programmes. There is much evidence to show that young sex offenders are amenable to treatment and that appropriate intervention is likely to be more immediately effective than with adult offenders. It has been stressed to me that extra stigmatisation would not help treatment of such young children, so I call on the Government to provide more facilities for treatment for both adult and young sex abusers of children. For the Government not to do so is to fail in the duty to protect children.

The registration periods in the Bill relate to the sentence given. For juveniles, that can mean detention in a young offender institution or training in a training school. For sentences of under 30 months, the Bill cuts to 50 per cent. the length of time that under-18s have to register, but once children cross that 30-month threshold, they are required to register for life. That may mean just 30 months in a training school. It cannot be viewed as being such a serious matter if a child goes to a training school, which may be the most important treatment that the child can have, but then in doing so he could be required to register for life. The offence might be no more than having a photograph. A nine or 10-year-old, for example, might have been given a photograph by an adult abuser, admitted having the photograph, be sent to a 30-month training school and consequently discover that he must register for life. The possibility is quite bizarre.

Sentencing of child offenders should always place great emphasis on rehabilitation as well as on punishment. It is hoped that young offenders' treatment programmes will be extended because of their success in reducing reoffending rates. The time that a court decides is necessary for treatment should not be influenced by a judge's desire for the child not to come under the lifetime registration requirement provided in the Bill.

[Mr. Thurnham]

In Committee, the Minister said:

"I emphasise strongly that there are no situations in which someone guilty of the relevant offences should be able to escape the registration requirement. Nor do I think that the registration period should be capable of alteration. The Bill sets tough periods of registration which will put a great obligation on people."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 4 February 1997; c. 24.]

However, the Minister seemed to realise the inappropriateness of such an approach for young sex offenders. When I raised the possibility of a nine or 10-year-old being in possession of an indecent photograph, he said that it is

"unlikely that a court would handle such a case so as to leave such a young child liable for a lifetime registration."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 6 February 1997; c. 77.]

I read that statement to mean that the Minister could envisage a situation in which someone guilty of the relevant offence should be able to escape the notification requirement.

The criminal justice system rightly treats juveniles differently from adults. The Bill should recognise that fact, rather than somehow, by sleight of hand, relying on judges not to be compromised in deciding the necessary treatment.

The Children's Charities Consortium was concerned with the consequences of parental responsibility for young offenders' registration, because, in many cases, young sex offenders may well be experiencing sexual abuse within their own families. We must realise that much sexual abuse occurs within families, and that a child might be required to register when he or she is abused.

I urge that area child protection committees should be the proper agencies for offenders aged under 16. Extra stigmatisation in such cases is unnecessary and unhelpful in children's treatment programmes, and courts should be able to order lengthy treatment programmes without feeling that they are inflicting on a child a lifetime's punishment. The principle of parental responsibility for the registration of young sex offenders is unsound because of the predominance of sex abuse within families.

I therefore believe that children under 16 should be removed from the notification requirements unless a court decides that compliance is appropriate in the circumstances.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I should like to say a few words in support of the amendment tabled and moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham) and to give an example. Someone came to my constituency surgery who had served a sentence of imprisonment for an offence committed when he was a teenager, although he is now an adult. He would have been subject to the registration provisions of this legislation. However, he has now settled down, put his prison period behind him and, I believe, effectively escaped from that part of his life.

Many believe that offences committed when one is under the age of 16 should be discounted for registration purposes and that, if we do not do so, there is no point in maintaining a statutory distinction between youths and adults. It is very important that society gets it right in establishing whether someone who has not reached his majority—even if he has reached the age of criminal responsibility—should be dealt with differently and less seriously for offences committed at that age. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North–East argued, it is very important that young people do not carry a stigma with them for the rest of their lives. I hope that the Government will respond in a positive manner to an enlightened and sensible proposal.

Mr. Kirkhope: The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) has explained his desire to exclude some young offenders from the scope of the registration provisions. At an earlier stage in the consideration of the Bill, he sought to take under-16s out of registration altogether. Now he has modified that approach and seeks to give the courts discretion whether or not to impose the notification requirement in the case of under-16s.

I am afraid that I remain equally opposed to that approach. The key point is that registration is not a punishment, but a device to secure public protection from those who have committed serious offences—and, as we all know, some under-16s have been responsible for horrific sexual crimes.

In convicting an under-16 of such an offence, the court will already have considered whether the child appreciated that the action was wrong. The younger the offender, the more careful the court will have been in that respect, but having reached a decision on criminal liability, however, what possible basis could there be for the court to decide that registration was not necessary in a particular case? We have not provided for discretion elsewhere in the Bill, and I see no case for it in this instance.

9.30 pm

Mr. Thurnham: I am extremely unhappy that the Government are not prepared to consider the amendment, and have given no indication that they might consider it further and table amendments in another place. I feel that I have put strong arguments.

The Bill is weakened by the fact that it contains bizarre provisions that could require an eight or nine-year-old to register for life. The Minister said that it was tough. On Second Reading, the Minister of State said that the Bill contained draconian measures. I find such requirements quite extraordinary. By not accepting earlier amendments that would have strengthened the Bill, we are in danger of producing a measure that is just a toothless soundbite. If it bites at all, it will bite on children themselves.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): Before the hon. Gentleman launches into rhetoric about toothless soundbites, may I point out the nonsense of the statement that he has just made? One cannot convict an eight or nine-year-old. The age of criminal consent is 10. If that is the strength of the hon. Gentleman's argument, my hon. Friend is absolutely right to resist his proposals tonight.

Mr. Thurnham: I am amazed by that intervention, because the Minister of State professes to be something of an expert on Scotland. He comes from Scotland. The Bill would affect eight-year-olds in Scotland. I referred to nine and 10-year-olds. The age of criminal consent is 10 in England and eight in Scotland, so the Minister does

not appear to have read the Bill. That confirms once again that the Government have not addressed the matter properly.

I should like to divide the House on the amendment, but as the Government have not indicated that they wish to continue with the business after 10 o'clock, I find it necessary to withdraw the amendment. If it was not for the pressure of time, I would certainly wish to divide the House. However, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment made: No. 1, in page 5, line 20, leave out '(b) to (d)'.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Clause 8

EXTENSION OF JURISDICTION: SCOTLAND

Amendment made: No. 9, in page 10, line 1,, leave out 'proving his' and insert 'setting out the'.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Schedule 1

SEXUAL OFFENCES TO WHICH PART I APPLIES

Mr. Michael: I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 12, leave out line 32 and insert—

'(a) Where the offender was under 20—

(i) paragraph (a)(v) and (vi) does not apply;

(ii) paragraph (a)(vii) and (viii) does not apply where the act would not have been an offence but for section 14(2) or section 15(2) of the Sexual Offences Act 1956, unless the court has imposed a term of imprisonment for the offence; and

(iii) paragraph a(iii) does not apply unless the court, having regard to the circumstances of the offence and the offender, in the interests of child protection, so directs.'

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 23, in page 12, line 35, after 'over;' insert—

'(bb) paragraph (a)(vi) above does not apply where the other party was 16 or over at the time of the offence and the offender was not sentenced to a term of imprisonment.'

Mr. Michael: There is an anomaly in the Bill arising from the Government's wish to have a degree of flexibility in relation to teenagers. In schedule 1 the requirement to register in relation to three offences—intercourse with a girl between 13 and 16, buggery, and indecency between men—does not apply where the offender was under 20. The amendment rephrases that provision to deal differently with each of the offences.

As I said in Committee, intercourse with a girl aged between 13 and 16 is one of the excluded offences. I understand that the Minister wants to avoid individuals involved in teenage sex being forced to register on a permanent basis under the terms of a Bill that targets paedophiles. However, by excluding the 18-year-old who has sex with a girl of almost 16, the Bill also leaves out the 19-year-old who has sex with a girl who has only just reached her 13th birthday. That illustrates the enormous range and variety of the offences that can be caught under the Bill; some are much more serious than others and the Minister must surely intend to catch those cases, particularly when the offence is very serious.

I pointed out in Committee that Lord Woolf ruled that indecency between men can only be consensual. We need to ensure that we target those who are a danger to children and not those who are not. The amendment would include for registration any serious cases of indecency involving 16 or 17-year-olds with someone over 20 if the seriousness of the offence was such that a court had imposed a term of imprisonment, but it would not catch cases in which there was a closeness of age, which is parallel to the exclusion that the Minister has allowed for heterosexual sex.

The amendments are modest, aimed at ensuring fairness and that we hit the target of those who are a danger to children, without accidentally hitting those who are not a danger to children. The Minister has also sought not to target such people.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I should like to intervene briefly to support the amendment.

Mr. Kirkhope: The aim of the first main proposal in amendment No. 22 is to exclude from the registration requirement offences of indecent assault on a girl or boy under 16 in which the so-called assault is in fact consensual, and no custodial sentence is imposed. The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) has focused on the fact that such behaviour may constitute an offence, even though consensual, because, under the 1956 Act, a child under 16 is not considered to be able to give consent to activities that, if non-consensual, would count as assault. The hon. Gentleman's solution is to seek to distinguish between serious and less serious cases with the test of imprisonment.

I agree that the amendment identifies a theoretical anomaly. A teenager who has committed consensual unlawful intercourse with a girl under 16 would avoid registration, whereas the same teenager, if charged with assault as a result of consensual indecent behaviour falling short of intercourse, would be required to register. I agreed in Committee to consider the matter further to see whether there was a way round that point. We have thought very hard about the matter, but we have concluded that any problem is more apparent then real, and that any solution would make the Bill more complex than it is already.

There could be difficulties, for example with offences tried before the passage of the Act, in knowing whether consent had been given, as the court would not necessarily have addressed that. We would have to put cases resulting in a custodial sentence in a separate category from, for example, those resulting in a community sentence, which could still be serious instances of the offence.

I do not believe that there is likely to be a problem in practice. I do not believe that cases are likely to come to court in respect of teenagers engaged in what are patently consensual intimate acts. The problem, if it exists, is inherent in the structure of the offences. Such offences could, in theory, occur whenever young teenagers cuddle one another, but I am not aware that prosecutions frequently take place following dances and discos for youngsters.

The second part of amendment No. 22 would toughen up the proposal in the Bill. Instead of our approach—under which the offence of unlawful sexual intercourse

[Mr. Kirkhope]

with a girl between 13 and 16 would not attract registration if the offender was under 20—the amendment would give the court discretion to require registration when the interests of child protection made that appropriate.

I have some sympathy with the motivation behind the amendment. I undertook in Committee to reflect on the hon. Gentleman's concern, but I am not persuaded that his proposal is the answer. It would make the scheme more complex and would create a further category of offenders subject to the registration requirement. It would make enforcement more difficult, because the police would not know, from the facts of the case and the sentence passed, whether the offender was liable for registration. The court would be invited to exercise discretion on whether registration was required in the particular instance, which we have avoided elsewhere in the Bill.

I do not believe that there is a real cause for concern. We decided to exclude consensual teenage sexual activity from the scheme and have used the age point as the means of achieving that end. Any age point may appear somewhat arbitrary at the margins, but I do not believe that it is likely to mean that those who should register will escape the requirement.

The effect of amendment No. 23 would be to exclude registration in any case of indecency between men where the victim is over 16 years old. I am aware of the arguments for reducing the age of homosexual consent to 16, but the fact remains that Parliament has decided that for homosexual offences the age of 18 must remain the threshold. That being so, I am not prepared to lift registration where the offence is committed against someone who is a minor for those purposes. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree not to press either of the amendments.

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to the Minister for his response, which acknowledged that basically there is an inconsistency. It seems that there is an inconsistency in one direction in the Bill, and we have sought at least to install fairness. That is all that we have sought to do. I should make it quite clear that we have not tried to go beyond what the Bill can do. As the Minister says, there is an argument in respect of the age of consent, but we have not sought to address that in any way, and I hope that he was not suggesting that we have.

Had the amendments been accepted, they would have taken us a step nearer fairness, balance and the protection of children. As the Minister clearly does not intend to accept them, I ask him to keep thinking and to talk to his colleagues in another place in the hope that we shall see fairness in the Bill before it completes its passage through Parliament.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Maclean: I beg to move amendment No. 32, in page 13, leave out lines 30 and 31.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendment No. 33.

Amendment No. 10, in page 13, line 36, after '(x)', insert

'subsections (5) and (6) of'.

Government amendments Nos. 34 to 39.

Amendment No. 7, in page 13, line 45, at end insert

'; and

(e) paragraphs (a)(viii) and (d)(x) do not apply where every person involved in the offence was 18 or over and was a willing participant.'.

Mr. Maclean: The broad purpose of this group of amendments is to align the Scottish offences with those in the list for England and Wales. Clearly it is important that there should be as close an alignment as possible between the two jurisdictions, so that offenders in different parts of the United Kingdom will be treated in the same way for registration purposes.

Half the amendments in the group cover homosexual offences, where we think it right to remove from the qualifying offences the Scottish offences that deal with procuring homosexual acts between two other men and those covering consensual adult homosexual activities. The amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) and others are in similar terms. We clearly share the same objective of ensuring that there is parity of treatment between homosexual offenders on either side of the border.

Similar considerations apply to exclusion of the procuring offences involving women, which would not trigger registration south of the border, and to the inclusion of the Scottish offence of unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl below the age of 13 where the offender is a teenager. In the amendments we have sought to achieve consistency across the jurisdictions.

Amendment No. 34 takes on board the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Dumbarton in Committee that there was an anomaly as between a person convicted of having intercourse with a step-child over the age of 18 and someone convicted of incest with a blood relative. The amendment cures that anomaly, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing it to the Government's attention.

I commend the whole series of Government amendments to the House and I invite the hon. Gentleman not to press his own amendments.

Mr. McFall: I shall not press amendments Nos. 7 and 10. I thank the Minister very much for his consideration of the points made in Committee. When the matter was put to the Scottish Office there seemed to be little forthcoming, but in Committee we had a very fruitful discussion. Those who are concerned about the issues in Scotland are certainly very pleased with the action that the Government have taken.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 33, in page 13, line 36, at beginning insert "subsection (5) of".

No. 34, in page 13, line 39, leave out '(vi)' and insert '(ii)'.

No. 35, in page 13, line 40, at end insert—

'( ) paragraphs (a)(viii) and (d)(x) above do not apply where every person involved in the offence, other than the offender, was 18 or over and was a willing participant;'.

No. 36, in page 13, line 43, leave out

'paragraphs (a)(viii) and (d)(x) do'

and insert 'paragraph (a)(viii) does'.

No. 37, in page 13, line 44, leave out second 'and'.

No. 38, in page 13, line 45, after "apply" insert "in the case of an offence in contravention of subsection (3) of section 5 (unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl over 13 but under 16)'.

No. 39, in page 13, line 45, at end insert

'and

( ) paragraph (d)(x) does not apply where the offender was under 20 and—

(i) where the offence involved an act of sodomy contrary to subsection (5) of section 13, every other person involved in the offence was a willing participant; or

(ii) the offence involved an act of gross indecency or shameless indecency contrary to the said subsection (5).'.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Schedule 2

SEXUAL OFFENCES TO WHICH SECTION 7 APPLIES

Mr. Michael: I beg to move amendment No. 24, in page 15, line 37, at end insert—

'(ia) section 4 (Administering drugs to obtain or facilitate intercourse);'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendments Nos. 2 and 3.

Amendment No. 26, in page 15, line 42, at end insert—

'(vii) section 17 (Abduction of a girl by force).'.

Amendment No. 27, in page 15, line 42, at end insert—

'(vii) section 20 (Abduction of an unmarried girl under 16 from parent or guardian).'.

Amendment No. 28, in page 15, line 42, at end insert—

'(vii) section 22A (Causing prostitution of girls).'.

Amendment No. 29, in page 15, line 42, at end insert—

'(vii) section 24 (Detention of girl in brothel or other premises).'.

Amendment No. 30, in page 15, line 42, at end insert—

'(vii) section 25 (Permitting girl under 13 to use premises for intercourse).'.

Amendment No. 31, in page 15, line 42, at end insert—

'(vii) section 28 (Causing or encouraging prostitution of, intercourse with or indecent assault on a girl under 16).'.

Government amendments Nos. 4 and 5.

Mr. Michael: I shall be very brief, because we raised the issues addressed in the amendments in Committee. I tabled the amendments because of the undertaking given by the Minister to consider the issues further. I hope that he will be able to respond positively. The amendments would add additional offences to the list of offences in schedule 2, because it would be anomalous if they were not included. They include administering drugs to obtain or facilitate intercourse; assault with intent to commit buggery; the abduction of a girl by force; the abduction of an unmarried girl under 16 from parent or guardian; causing prostitution of girls; the detention of a girl in brothel or other premises; permitting a girl under 13 to use premises for intercourse; and causing or encouraging prostitution of, intercourse with or indecent assault on a girl under 16. It seemed odd that those offences were not included in schedule 2 and, in Committee, the Minister undertook to consider their inclusion.

9.45 pm

Mr. Kirkhope: It is worth recalling the origin of the list in schedule 2. It is substantially the same as that contained in the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996—that is to say, the offences of child sexual abuse in respect of which the UK courts now have jurisdiction when conspiracies or incitements take place in this country to commit those offences abroad. In a sense, that Act created a standard list of the acts of child sex abuse likely to be committed by sex tourists, and I do not recall that there were concerns that that list was incomplete or had missed out significant offences.

In drafting the Bill, we followed that earlier list, but we decided to add the main child pornography offences. The member states of the European Union agreed last autumn, in the aftermath of the terrible Belgian case, on a joint action to combat the trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation. Taking extra-territorial jurisdiction over child pornography offences was one of the provisions in that agreement, in recognition of the link—whether causal or not—that often exists between the sexual abuse of children and child pornography.

I was pressed in Committee to consider going wider, and to include a much longer list of offences in the Bill. I undertook to consider that proposal, and have tabled an amendment to add one further offence—assault with intent to commit buggery. I concluded that that was an offence that might be committed by a British sex tourist abroad. I do not believe that the same applies to the other offences that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) has proposed adding. Some are concerned with the organising of prostitution, or allowing the use of premises for under-age sexual activity to take place, and I do not believe they are likely to be committed by Britons who will subsequently return to this country.

Others in the hon. Gentleman's list—for example, amendments Nos. 26 and 27—are focused on abduction for the purposes of sexual intercourse and, again, relate more to what may be done by those promoting prostitution abroad, rather than the actions of our own nationals and residents. The Bill is targeted at our own sex tourists, and I believe that it will, as drafted, and with the addition of the offence of assault with intent to commit buggery, catch the offenders at whom it is directed.

Mr. Michael: I am grateful for the Minister's response and for the fact that he has taken the trouble to consider the matter further, as promised. We would have liked him to move further, but at least his consideration has proved fruitful.

At every stage of the Bill, we have sought to improve it and speed its passage. It is a measure that we have long desired to see on the statute book. I therefore do not intend to prolong our debate now, and I am sure that the matter will be considered further in another place.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made: No. 2, in page 15, line 41, leave out 'and'.

[Mr. Michael]

No. 3, in page 15, line 42, at end insert

'and

(vii) section 16 (assault with intent to commit buggery);'.

No. 4, in page 16, line 1, leave out '(iv), (v) and (vi)' and insert 'and (iv) to (vii)',

No. 5, in page 16, line 11, leave out

'indecent assault upon a male person'

and insert

'(assault with intent to commit buggery or indecent assault upon a male person)'.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

9.48 pm

Mr. Maclean: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Today's debate has covered a number of aspects of the Bill, some of which have been specific—for example, whether this or that offence should be included—and other points have been much wider, including, for example, the complicated issue of police practice in the use and disclosure of information.

It has not been possible for the Government to accept all the points that have been made. None the less, I appreciate the spirit in which they have been put forward from both sides of the House. I thank the hon. Members who have taken part in our proceedings, whether tonight, in Committee or on Second Reading.

Our debate on the Bill has strengthened and improved it as a measure for the protection of children. I am also grateful for the input to the debate provided by others with an interest. The police and other agencies involved with child welfare have provided invaluable insights into the practical aspects of how the registration requirement will work.

Those have enabled us to develop and improve on our original proposals to ensure that the registration requirement will really work in practice. I cannot emphasise too much how grateful I am to those people, especially those in the Association of Chief Police Officers, who have been enormously helpful.

I hope, therefore, that the Bill will conclude its parliamentary passage quickly, so that it can soon begin to provide the added protection for our children that is its prime aim.

9.50 pm

Mr. McFall: I welcome the progress that the Government have made. As has been said already, we had a fruitful discussion in Committee, Frankly, however, I do not believe that the Government have moved far enough. The Bill will play its part in what needs to be a more comprehensive response to child abuse. The omission that we tried to put right by tabling new clauses 2 and 3 will weaken it considerably.

We must take account of public opinion. I feel that Parliament is out of synch with public opinion. The Minister is aware of the situation in Scotland. Only today, Scotland's best-selling newspaper, the *Daily Record*, devotes its front page to "Scotland's Child Abuse Scandal".

The *Daily Record* is setting up an eight-point campaign to highlight the issue—a campaign that I support in detail. The paper says that information on child sex offences in Scotland is not available. It points out that statistics on cruelty to animals are available, but that on sex offences the information is not forthcoming.

People from the *Daily Record* contacted the Secretary of State's Office in Scotland but were told that he was too busy. Only last week the right hon. Gentleman contacted a local newspaper reporter whom I know. An open letter had been written, and the Secretary of State invited the reporter into his office to put his point of view. Yet when he was asked which information was available and which was not, he was too busy to reply.

The newspaper also contacted the Crown Office for information, but there, too, the message was that there was none. When will the Government put that information into the public domain? By failing to do so, they do a disservice to the many hundreds, even thousands, of people affected.

The sad fact is that paedophiles cause manifold damage. For every case that comes to court, hundreds of similar offences have been committed. Aberdeen university recently undertook a study in which 34 sex offenders, who had been convicted of 115 offences among them, confessed to having actually committed 1,500 offences. The court cases are the tip of the iceberg.

It is ironic that it should be this evening, when "No Child of Mine" is being screened—it could be happening at this very moment—that we are passing legislation that does not go far enough. The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and I went to the presentation of "No Child of Mine". I did not see any other Members of Parliament there. It was a long film, and the hon. Lady walked out. So far as I know, she had first asked, "Why is this being shown?"

That is symptomatic of the approach that our society has taken. We cannot deal with child abuse here: sure, we can deal with it when it is abroad—in Bangkok and other such places—but if it happens in Glasgow, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Bournemouth or wherever, then we cannot deal with it.

We must face up to the issues. The Government's lack of resolve was illustrated by the fact that they wanted to enact the legislation through a private Member's Bill. Only the resolve of the Opposition ensured that we had a Government Bill. We want the Bill to succeed, but it does not go far enough. The Government have shown themselves out of sync with the people.

The Minister mentioned Belgium and Marc Dutroux. We do not want to wait until such a situation arises here. That is why we want the Government to go further. The campaign will not stop here. It will go on and on. Vision has been required of the Government, but they have shown a lack of deep thought. This is unfinished business: the Opposition welcome the Bill, but there is much more to do to protect our young people. That message should go out loud and clear from Parliament tonight as we welcome the provisions in the Bill.

9.55 pm

Mr. Thurnham: I support the Bill, but I feel that it is only half or a quarter of a loaf. I hope that it will be strengthened in another place in the manner for which we argued on Second Reading, in Committee, and again today.

There should be a code of practice to give guidance to the police and, most of all, there should be a requirement for previous offenders who are known to the police to register. At present, about 50,000 previous offenders escape the provisions of the Bill. It should be simple for the police, when they are in contact with them, to require notification of a change of address.

The Bill should be strengthened, and I hope that my arguments about children will be well considered in the other place, without the pressures of time that we have had tonight. I look forward to the Bill reaching the statute book, but I hope that it will do so in a greatly improved state.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees).

Future Noise Policy

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 11419/96, the Commission Green Paper on future noise policy; and endorses the Government's objective of opposing a number of the proposals on noisé exposure when presenting the response of the United Kingdom to the Green Paper to the European Commission.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

PETITIONS

Child Protection

9.56 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): I have two petitions to present—one on the Lever Park Bill and one, most appropriately, on the Sex Offenders Bill that we have been debating tonight. Even more appropriately, the latter comes from Oundle school in Northamptonshire—the school that I went to and one that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, know well—and bears the signatures of more than 800 pupils and staff. The petition says:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of Staff and Students of Oundle School in the county of Northamptonshire with Members of Action for Children Campaign and other Citizens of the United Kingdom,

Sheweth that we have deep concern at continuing reports that citizens of developed nations travelling abroad may be encouraging the use of children in prostitution and pornography, that we are committed to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which seeks to protect children from sexual exploitation; and believe that Her Majesty's Government should seek to play an active role in bringing about concerted international action to tackle this problem and in particular examine ways of ensuring that individuals involved in such exploitation are brought to justice within the United Kingdom.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House do introduce legislation to ensure that citizens of the United Kingdom who commit serious sexual offences against children abroad can be prosecuted in this country.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Lever Park Bill

9.58 pm

Mr. Thurnham: The second petition bears 5,807 signatures and concerns the Lever Park Bill. It says:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the people of Bolton North East and the surrounding areas, including the members of the Owls Motorcycle Club,

Sheweth that they oppose the proposed development of Lever Park in Bolton.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House reject the Lever Park Bill in order to preserve free access to the park for the public, in accordance with Lord Leverhulme's wishes.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Empty Homes

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

9.59 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): My debate relates to empty homes, but at this time of night it might better have related to an empty Chamber. There are 800,000 empty homes, and this important matter was the subject of my ten-minute Bill on 27 February 1996. Since then, the number of empty homes has fallen by 15,000 but that disguises the fact that public sector voids have risen. Great play is often made of the fall in the provision of new homes from nearly 400,000 in the 1960s to fewer than 200,000 in 1990.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

While no one would suggest that the huge stock of void premises would resolve both the demand for new homes and the need to house homeless people, a fair analysis of the housing market would place much more emphasis on facilitating the release of more empty houses for use.

House builders lament the fall in the number of new homes, perhaps not surprisingly. Luminaries such as Michael Ball of South Bank university and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation conclude that more house building is needed. They make powerful arguments but they must be put alongside other factors.

The number of public sector empty homes rose last year. Local authorities voids went up from 2 to 2.3 per cent. of stock. In housing associations, voids rose from 2.4 to 2.5 per cent. In other public sector bodies, including Government Departments, voids went up from 16 to 17 per cent. More details have been supplied today to the Library.

Conventional wisdom on housing policy gives almost exclusive attention to new building. We need a wider horizon. First, new buildings often infill existing housing space and destroy the character of our neighbourhoods in north London and elsewhere. Secondly, in consequence of infilling with new houses, it is less likely that we will be able to find places off the roads to park and store the burgeoning number of vehicles that this prosperous Government have produced.

Thirdly, new land is often used because demolition and site clearance or, worse, decontamination of existing sites, are expensive. Fourthly, it takes pressure off the need to use existing housing. Fifthly, and fundamental to this debate, it is an indictment of us all that housing is kept empty. It is frustrating, and annoying to the homeless. It creates an eyesore and is a blight on adjacent housing stock. Finally, empty homes often lead to squatting, which is ghastly for all concerned.

My debate aims to examine a new way in which to encourage, and in some cases compel, the use of empty public property. I have been greatly assisted by the Empty Homes Agency. I have advised the all-party group on homelessness and housing needs of my proposals. I am pleased that there is widespread interest and support. Everyone recognises the overwhelming need to make the best possible use of our housing stock, not least because the homeless deserve the support of the House.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): I congratulate my hon. Friend on obtaining this most important debate. Will he join me in paying tribute to *The Big Issue* for running a petition that seeks to bring into use empty housing stock, which would go almost all the way to resolving our homelessness problem?

Mr. Booth: I am grateful for that intervention, which was perspicacious, if not telepathic, because my next sentence is that I commend the concern of the magazine, *The Big Issue*, which has also supported my Bill.

Although this is not ten-minute rule procedure, I take this opportunity briefly to explain to the House the proposals contained in my Bill, which I believe will be useful. They are contained in an ambitious draft document entitled "The Empty Homes Bill 1997". The Bill gives formal expression to ideas on how we could better use unoccupied buildings. It requires local authorities to designate an empty property officer responsible for securing the re-use of unoccupied residential buildings owned by public bodies within the authority's area.

It is always open to a Government who might wish to introduce the policy to allow for the appointment of a surveyor from the private sector to act as such an officer, rather than add to a local authority's payroll. The officer would be empowered to investigate ownership and order the reoccupation of all unoccupied buildings owned by local authorities, Government Departments and executive agencies, including housing associations, by people in housing need. I suggest that the residential building should have been unoccupied for six months, although the precise period could be settled later.

My previous attempt to propose policy in this area was construed by some merely as an attack on local authorities. This Bill takes an all-party approach—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that in an Adjournment debate he cannot promote a Bill. I am sure that he is referring to a document or some other piece of material.

Mr. Booth: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for being so courteous in your instruction.

This document takes an all-party approach, and attacks all public bodies from both central and local government. Paragraph 2.4 of my suggested policy provides a comprehensive list of those bodies. It is important to give the new empty property officers some power, so the next section empowers them to investigate and obtain information about the ownership and control of void property, then to recover their expenses against the body responsible for that empty home.

Officers may publish details of property if they feel that publication will, in itself, secure the swift re-use of residential premises. They are also empowered to contact the owner in writing, ordering reoccupation of the building within 28 days. They can further order that the residential occupant may be a family or household in housing need. Their power to order the use of an empty property has some exemptions, one of which is the Ministry of Defence in certain circumstances. Empty homes officers can also exempt those who have satisfied them that they will use their property within six months or demolish it within that period. Obviously, in the real world one must allow for those changes.

The county court would be given the authority to supervise the proceedings and provide a safeguard to balance the needs of public bodies with the dire needs

of homeless families. The county court's power may include ordering a grant of freehold or leasehold to a family in certain circumstances. The business of property rights, however, is tricky. Public bodies own nothing in their own right but are simply trustees for all of us.

The public need to be protected and, in addition to inserting the role of the county court, the next section of my proposal ensures that, if a conflict of interests arises between an empty homes officer and his local authority, a neighbouring authority should nominate an alternative officer through the good offices of the Secretary of State, represented tonight by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison).

The proposers of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, which allowed people to require the disposal of property, will find it interesting that there is an admirable example of a link with their pioneer legislation. I propose that the public request to order disposal of land and buildings procedure—what a mouthful—known as PROD for short, be harnessed to require disposal of certain homes to meet local authority or local housing need. In all cases, where freeholds are transferred, compensation will come into the equation.

Last but not least, under my Bill local authorities would be required to prepare and publish an empty properties strategy each year, to secure the re-use of unoccupied residential premises in their area. The duty follows full consultation with landlords and professional advisers, and should include information on the number of unoccupied properties in the authority area and provide details of ownership and location. Annual targets should be set, and measures that the local authority considers practical should be agreed to achieve full occupation.

It is our duty in the House to provide for the needs of those who find it hardest to help themselves, and those who are homeless must join the top of the list. It is to our shame that we have in our country so many empty properties yet about 150,000 people are defined by law as homeless. The Government have done a great deal, through the rough sleepers initiative, which I commend, and a host of other policies for the homeless, but I and others still identify a problem.

Unlike most problems, the problem contains the seeds of its own solution; uniquely, we can solve one problem by putting another right. We can substantially resolve the problem of homelessness by putting right our failure as a community to use empty public property adequately. For the sake of our cities, for the sake of the good name of the House and for all those who have no homes tonight, I urge the House that, better than acting, we should enact my proposal.

10.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): I welcome the opportunity to respond to this debate on an important subject. My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) has demonstrated before the House his long-standing knowledge and expertise on this subject, in which he has taken a great interest for many years.

I assure my hon. Friend that it is of continuing concern to the Government that every potential home in the public or private sector be used. The Government's best estimates point to a 4.4 million growth in the number of households between 1991 and the year 2016 and, as my hon. Friend rightly argued, against that background we must have a strategy that makes best use of all existing housing. We cannot afford to have homes lying empty, for the reasons that my hon. Friend eloquently set out, and the desire to make best use of our homes is widely shared, as my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) emphasised in his intervention.

The latest figures, for 1 April 1996, show a welcome overall estimated 9 per cent. reduction in the number of vacant dwellings in England since April 1993. That is welcome news, but every home lying empty unnecessarily—owned by a local authority or housing association or privately owned—is a wasted resource, which could provide a home for someone in housing need.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration said when launching the empty homes week of action on 17 February, there is a role for each of us to play in addressing the problem. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and the House will agree, after hearing my response to his speech, that much is already being done by the Government and all the relevant agencies.

Empty homes fall into different categories, according to their ownership. I will deal first with the local authority sector. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration announced on 14 February that the number of local authority "management" vacants—dwellings that are ready for occupation immediately, or after minor works—rose to 47,700 at 1 April 1996, from 41,000 in April 1995. That is disappointing news. My hon. Friend made some observations about that, with which it is hard to disagree.

The Government encourage local authorities to find ways of maximising the use of their existing stock. Authorities can do that in a number of ways. For example, they can reduce under-occupation, first by ensuring that tenants are allocated homes that are the right size for their needs; secondly, by using transfers, exchanges and mobility schemes to release under-occupied dwellings, and thirdly, by using cash incentive schemes to encourage tenants to move to smaller homes or to buy a home in the private sector.

Collaboration between housing associations and local authorities to tackle under-occupation is essential. Local authorities can use their nomination rights to housing associations' dwellings and they can work with housing associations on planning new developments so as to achieve the right size of dwelling and type of housing.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best things that local authorities can do, especially those who deal with run-down local authority housing estates, is to pass those estates to the ownership of non-profit-making organisations, which generally run them much better, in the interests of tenants and the homeless?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend will be aware of the efforts that we have made to promote housing transfer and to bring private investment into housing, and especially of the efforts that we have made to help the poorest estates, through the estates renewal challenge fund. It gave me pleasure yesterday to visit in Durham one of the first of those estates to pass to a housing association. That has been met with great optimism in Durham.

[Mr. Clappison]

Housing associations' performance in minimising their empty properties is generally good, and their vacancy rate is fairly stable. Housing associations are now required, collectively, to generate 500 extra lettings each year, by bringing vacant levels down further. The Housing Corporation publishes performance indicators which show that the target is being met. We can expect continued improvements as the corporation takes an increasing interest in the performance of individual housing associations.

The Government fully accept that they, too, should keep their own house in order. Government Departments have made great strides over the past few years to tackle the problem of empty homes. The number of empty homes on the civil estate fell by almost 600 between April 1995 and April 1996, and more exacting targets were set for 1996-97. That is on top of significant reductions achieved the previous year. We are particularly keen to ensure that Departments do not hold on to their empty properties for long periods. That is why we have set separate targets for tackling properties that are empty for more than six months.

Our key objective remains that of getting empty Government-owned properties into the hands of those who can make best use of them, and we encourage Government Departments to consider the option of sale or lease for social housing. Sale to the private sector can also help to address housing need, by creating home ownership opportunities and expanding the supply of rented housing.

One of the notable facts about empty homes is that by far the greatest number of vacancies is in the private rented sector. It is encouraging to see that the numbers of empty homes in the private sector have fallen, from 690,000 in 1995 to 667,000 in 1996. Nobody pretends that it is easy to find a solution to the problem, as the reasons for privately owned property lying empty are complex. Research carried out for my Department by a university showed that many privately owned properties are empty for valid reasons, reflecting normal transactions in the market. However, there are longer-term, problematic vacancies that require attention.

Local authorities have a role in tackling that problem, not only by keeping their own empty properties to a minimum, but by developing a corporate approach, working in partnership with housing associations, private owners and developers, property professionals and other public and voluntary sector bodies.

The problem of empty homes cannot be tackled in isolation. The most effective projects are part of broader-based regeneration programmes, tackling housing problems alongside unemployment, training, crime prevention and so on. For that reason, we have maintained the existing level of funding under the single regeneration budget for this year.

However, the most important role for Government is to create the conditions for a healthier housing market and remove obstacles to its effective working. The housing market is now on a firm upward trend. Low interest rates and low inflation mean that housing is now more affordable than it has been since the early 1970s. There could not be a better time for the first-time buyer to enter the market.

We have also put together a package of measures that will make letting a home easier and safer, and that will play an important part in encouraging more owners of empty properties to let them. The Housing Act 1988 made letting an empty property a more viable option by removing rent control and introducing the assured shorthold tenancy. The Housing Act 1996 progressed the situation further, making it easier for owners to let their properties on an assured shorthold tenancy and for landlords to get their properties back if tenants do not pay their rent or cause a nuisance to local people.

My hon. Friend went into some detail about his ideas for tackling these problems, such as appointing an empty property officer. I hope that he will not mind if I do not go into the details of his proposals. I know that my hon. Friend has had some interesting discussions about them. I assure him that we are anxious to see the records of some local authorities improve in this field. We want the worst performers to try to lift their standards to those of the best, who have set a good example in this area. The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) seems unable to restrain himself, so I shall give way.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I have restrained myself from commenting in the debate so far. I apologise to the hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) for arriving late to the Chamber owing to a prior housing engagement. Nevertheless, I told him that I was keen to be present for the debate. I welcome his initiative in raising the issue of empty properties. As to the percentage of properties that are currently void, no local authority in the country has as bad a record as some Government Departments. I hope that the Minister will adopt the view that the Government should take the lead by putting their own house in order before they lecture others about the proportion of empty properties.

Mr. Clappison: I have already set out our approach to that situation, and the emphasis that we place on Government Departments' minimising the number of empty properties. However, I cannot allow to pass without comment the fact that the performances of local authorities vary widely in this area, as my hon. Friend correctly pointed out in his speech. The fact that some authorities are not reaching the standards of the best authorities means that hundreds—in some cases, even a thousand—properties are lying empty at a time of housing need.

Figures issued recently show the different performances of local authorities. The London borough of Islington has slightly more than 4 per cent. management vacancies, which is approximately twice the average for England. Other prominent offenders are Blackburn with 3.59 per cent., Tameside with 2.73 per cent., and Trafford with 2.74 per cent. They are percentages, but we will get some idea of the housing need if we look at the absolute figures. Some 1,484 properties are standing empty in Islington, 408 in Blackburn, 510 in Tameside and 320 in Trafford—nearly 3,000 potential homes. Other authorities in a

similar position to those authorities manage to achieve a much better rate. It would be possible for the authorities to meet the housing needs of many hundreds of people.

Mr. Raynsford: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a Back-Bench Adjournment debate, and it should not be abused by Front Benchers.

Mr. Clappison: I hope that I have answered my hon. Friend's points and the concerns that he expressed about local authorities. While I do not want to go into all the details, we think that local authorities have an important role to play and we want them to meet high standards.

We regard empty property strategies as important, and we encourage local authorities to include a means of dealing with those properties in their housing strategies. We have given them every encouragement in that regard.

My hon. Friend mentioned the Empty Homes Agency, which was launched in 1992 by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), the present Secretary of State for Transport. My Department is part funding the agency for three years to work with local authorities to develop empty property strategies. The agency has made considerable progress: it is in contact with more than 250 authorities, some 160 of which are now taking specific action to reduce the number of empty properties in their areas. I am confident that that number will continue to grow.

We are playing an active role in addressing the problem on several fronts. It is a very important subject, and my hon. Friend has done the House a service by raising it this evening and by advancing his interesting, innovative and well-thought-out ideas.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 26 February 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NATO

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): I welcome this opportunity to debate the expansion of NATO. Like others of my generation, I remember how the United States air force went home after the second world war had ended. I remember the Berlin blockade, how the Berlin airlift was initiated and how the US air force—God bless them—returned to the United Kingdom bases. I also remember how the north Atlantic treaty came into being, and I remember vividly Churchill's iron curtain speech.

I remember all those things because I was a young service man at the time. I look back on almost 50 years of successful NATO activity. I remember such things because my generation paid expensively for the mistakes that had been made in the 1920s and 1930s.

"This innocent" is how I was described in *The Sunday Times* by a fellow named Simon Sebag-Montefiore, who must be important with a name like that. If I am an innocent, many of my generation are also innocents, and we care deeply about the mistakes that were made in the 1920s and 1930s, especially the 1930s.

I cannot forget that NATO was the commitment made largely by the US Government to send hundreds of thousands of US service men to Europe. That is what gave NATO its deterrent capability and made the alliance meaningful. That credibility enhanced the security of all the member states. The Washington treaty declared that an armed attack on the territory of any member state would be regarded as an attack on all: to wage war on one was to declare war on all—article 5 left no doubt about that commitment.

In the beginning, only the United States was a nuclear power. Britain and France were also to become nuclear powers. Throughout its life, Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent capability, carried first by aircraft and later by submarines, has been committed to NATO. The same has been true of our theatre nuclear weapons. Thus, the British—but not the French—nuclear capability was committed to the defence of the territory of our NATO allies in Europe: the British nuclear umbrella offered protection to our NATO allies throughout Europe.

Anyone who has studied the structures of NATO will recognise that NATO operates in two fields—the political field, where the French have remained, and the military field, which the French left. I shall deal first with the military field, as I believe that NATO's success has been due mainly to its military credibility, which has been recognised by friends and foes alike. That credibility was brought about in part by the massive US presence in Europe. Without that presence, NATO would have been seen as a political alliance without teeth.

The presence of the US forces has been critical. The command and control structure has worked. Without it, NATO would not have been an effective military force. Without a heavy lift capability provided by the United States, NATO would have been unable to deploy its military assets successfully, where required. The United States' contribution to command and control—and, to a smaller but still important extent, that of Britain—is an important factor. The co-operation paid off first in the Gulf, where military operations were largely built upon NATO command and control activities, and later in Bosnia. Put simply, the United States has provided the military leaders, and Britain has provided the deputies. We must examine carefully anything that may threaten NATO military command and control or the US commitment to Europe. That is why I called for the debate this morning.

I am concerned about the expansion of NATO. Like everyone else, I wish to enjoy any dividend that may follow the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact military threat. You will notice, Madam Speaker, that I do not talk about the peace dividend. I believe that we have enjoyed the peace secured by a powerful and a credible NATO: peace over the years is the real dividend. The House should address the risks involved in NATO expansion. I accept that all change involves an element of risk, but we must assess the level of risk and decide whether it is acceptable. If it is not, we must think again.

There are five basic criteria for NATO membership: an established democracy, respect for human rights, a market-based economy, armed forces under full civilian control, and good relations with neighbouring states. I understand that 10 countries—Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia—have submitted discussion papers on membership.

We must ask: against whom is the bigger NATO directed? I believe that it is directed against no one, but those pushing for its expansion claim that it is necessary for the security of Europe. I cannot be the only one who believes that opening up trade opportunities is the most effective way of making the "Partnership for Peace" work. That is the real way to peace: it cannot be achieved through military alliances. A free trade area throughout Europe, including free trade with the former Warsaw pact countries, would do more to maintain peace than signing any military agreements. That is why it is important to recognise that NATO is in two parts: political and military. I am concerned that the political wing of NATO—which is a defence alliance—is confusing what should be urgent free trade discussions. That is putting at risk this most successful military alliance.

Does anyone seriously believe that a defence alliance around the perimeter of Russia, from the Balkans to Moldova and the Ukraine, will not have an impact in Moscow? I judge that it could create an atmosphere from which extreme politicians might emerge as the next leaders of Russia. I accept that Russia poses no threat at present, but I remind the House that no one had heard of Hitler in 1930. By 1940—in 10 short years—he had created the largest military machine seen at that time and occupied most of Europe. Who can say what the next

[Mr. Bill Walker]

10 years may bring. History tells us that the actions of today sow the seeds of the harvest that we shall reap in the next 10 to 15 years. I also remind the House that Britain entered the second world war because we had a treaty with Poland. NATO expansion would recreate such treaties.

We should discuss the prospects of a free trade area covering the north Atlantic and embracing the United States, Canada, Mexico, the European Union and the former Warsaw pact countries. That is the road to peace. I oppose using NATO for a purpose for which it was not intended. NATO is a defence alliance, and I want it to remain intact. I also want the American presence in Germany to continue, as its removal would put NATO's military credibility at great risk.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, especially as I will not be able to stay for the whole debate because I must attend a meeting of the Defence Committee. I apologise to the House. I share my hon. Friend's concerns. Does he accept that there is a strong, and perhaps unstoppable, movement towards expanding NATO that has started in the United States—it may be fuelled by expatriate communities—and is supported by the countries of eastern and central Europe? Perhaps Russian fears could be assuaged by placing more emphasis on "Partnership for Peace" which, with the trade links that my hon. Friend has urged, is a way of keeping in touch with central and eastern European countries without expanding NATO.

Mr. Walker: My hon. Friend, whose experience and interest in this area spans many years, expresses the views of many. "Partnership for Peace" is not the same as a defence alliance, but it is a meaningful and positive way forward. I am concerned that forces within the United States—some of whom have never understood properly why it was necessary to maintain a huge American presence in Europe—are motivated by hopes of reducing military expenditure. That is always a problem during times of peace when there is no obvious threat. They want to see the so-called peace dividend, although I have never supported that idea.

I think that we are now entering a period similar to the 1930s: if we get it wrong, our grandchildren will have to put it right. All of my life, I have been determined that the mistakes made by my father's and my grandfather's generations would not be repeated while I was in public life. That is why I am in public life and, if I am an innocent, so be it, but my innocence is the result of military experience, where I learnt to my cost and that of many colleagues what happens when one is ill prepared and has the wrong weapons systems.

We should discuss the prospects of a free trade area covering the north Atlantic and embracing the United States, Canada, Mexico, the European Union and the former Warsaw pact countries. That makes sense for us now, because the expected growth of the Pacific rim countries, and future competition from that part of the world, will hit us hard. It makes sense for the old industrial nations of the west and the former Soviet Union to get together to decide how to address those challenges.

I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that the British should argue, whatever our friends in the United States say, that the matter be discussed in greater depth. We believe that NATO should remain as it is, with command and control and the US presence in Europe intact. The US heavy lift capability should remain intact and be committed unreservedly. Without that capability, we cannot deploy our military assets.

We should have meaningful discussions about collaboration, but we should also give deep and serious consideration to the risks and the practicalities of allowing former Warsaw pact countries to be members of a defence alliance. We know that their equipment will not fit in initially, and it will be many years before it is compatible. Does anyone seriously believe that those countries could provide meaningful contributions with their armed forces? We must think it through carefully and fully.

Problems may well result from bilateral negotiations that have taken place between Russia and the former Warsaw pact countries, and possibly with some members of NATO since the Berlin wall has come down. All of that has to be considered carefully before we sign up to bringing people into a defence alliance that has worked and which must continue if we are to continue to enjoy the real peace that comes from having the ability to deter. I remind the House that, if we accept former Warsaw pact countries as members of a defence alliance that makes an attack on one an attack on all, we are back to where we were in 1939.

9.50 am

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) on securing this very important debate, which should have taken place a long time ago. It is ironic that, rather than the Government initiating a free-standing debate on the enlargement of NATO at least two years ago, it has been left to a Back Bencher to secure a debate on a Wednesday morning.

From the number of articles that have appeared recently in various newspapers, it is clear that there is growing speculation and, in some cases, concern about the enlargement of NATO. When I visited NATO headquarters last year, during the all-party annual visit to NATO, which I always find very revealing—in fact, I get more answers from NATO than I do on the Floor of the House of Commons—it seemed as though enlargement was being accepted as a fait accompli. I am opposed to the enlargement of NATO, for many of the reasons that the hon. Member for North Tayside mentioned. I do not agree entirely with his analysis, but I agree with the main thrust of his argument.

I shall put some of the arguments against enlargement. I suggest that it is likely to antagonise Russia and jeopardise peaceful co-operation with the west, as is becoming clear. NATO's raison d'être has always been the creation of a security alliance in opposition to Russia. Consequently, not only Russia's political elite, but the population at large, perceive expansion as a threat and are overwhelmingly opposed to it. As many of us who have monitored Russian elections and have been there know, there has been a significant rise in anti-democratic, anti-western forces and nationalist sentiments, which may be encouraged by NATO expansion, creating a Russia and a President with whom the west may not be able to negotiate. It is doubtful whether current efforts and proposals for co-operation will be sufficient to reassure those elements.

I maintain that expansion will remilitarise the Russian-western relationship. That relationship has, since 1989, been based on arms transparency. A change may encourage the development of an alternative Russian-centred security alliance to the east, thus creating again two blocs and a cold war Europe. Likewise, efforts to improve controls on nuclear weapons and the conventional forces in Europe agreement could be undermined as Russia becomes increasingly paranoid and unco-operative.

Since the end of the cold war, many of us have been concerned about the former Soviet Union and what will happen to the people who worked in its nuclear installations and secret cities. Their skills, possibly, may no longer be used in their own countries, but they may be required by countries that we would not like to develop a nuclear capability.

NATO is currently stronger than Russia militarily by three to one, but that will increase to four to one after expansion. There is no current security threat to central and eastern Europe, so why destabilise the existing relationships that appear to work? I maintain that expansion will weaken NATO, because it already takes a considerable time to mobilise and reach agreement among 16 members. It will be much harder with 19-plus members. Likewise, the new members will be weaker in their capacity and may prove to be a burden.

Expansion will prove costly to NATO, and carry dubious benefits. According to *The Times*, NATO expansion will cost $35 billion over the next 12 years. Figures from the US congressional office estimate the cost to be between $61 billion and $125 billion. The UK's current share of the NATO budget is 10 per cent., so expansion will have considerable cost implications for the United Kingdom.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): The hon. Lady quoted a figure of $35 billion, but the assumption is that military bases financed by NATO will not be placed in some of the countries that join. The $125 billion figure takes into account the serious problems of interoperability and the higher costs of trying to fuse all the different armies together. The cost, as has been pretty well agreed, will be at the lower end, and nuclear weapons and military bases will not be positioned in the new member countries. It is the lower end that we have to consider—$35 billion to $40 billion over 10 years.

Mrs. Clwyd: The right hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, but the cost will be much greater than he suggests. The problem is that the House has never debated the cost of expansion. It is essential that we fully understand the implications. He says that the cost may be at the lower end, but I think that it will be closer to the higher end. None of us knows. That is why we should have a proper debate in the House.

I think that expansion will prove costly to new members, because they lack the financial resources, have limited skilled personnel and have poorer communications and logistical structures. One recent estimate suggested that military spending in those countries would increase by 60 to 80 per cent., placing a further strain on the budgets of countries that need the money for economic and social reforms. Ironically, expansion may undermine plans for economic reform and jeopardise the domestic stability that it is attempting to encourage.

Expansion would also increase the insecurity of states that are excluded. Ukraine in particular has expressed fears that it may be placed in a compromising position and face pressure from Russia to join an eastern security alliance. Ironically, expansion would not cover the main countries that need a security cloak, such as the Baltics, whereas those that do not need it are most likely to be included.

NATO expansion is merely an excuse for not proceeding at a speedier rate with European Union expansion. Some Conservative Members may have views on that. Unfortunately, what the region needs most is the economic and social benefits of EU membership, not the potential burden of a western security alliance. There was an interesting letter in the *Financial Times* a few days ago from James Eberle, former director of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. He had just returned from Moscow and wrote:

"as a former Nato commander, I feel it is abundantly clear that, unless there is a substantial breakdown of the political and social order in central and eastern Europe, the principal threats to European security will not be in the military field. It is thus also clear where our priorities should lie."

He went on to say:

"The initial Nato enlargement decision in January 1994 was made without proper preparation; and there is still no unifying vision among member countries as to its strategic purpose. There has been no public debate. Ratification of the entry of each new member will be required in due course by allied parliaments, and this will be a difficult process . . . it will not be easy to reach an agreement that will give Russia the status and participation that she is seeking, yet which does not surrender Nato's freedom of action to a Russian veto."

People with considerable experience in international affairs have very real concerns.

The timetable and the process of enlargement have largely been set by the United States domestic agenda to deliver President Clinton's 1999 promise. That has been the driving force behind this undue haste. There has not been a rational consideration of the pros and cons.

There are other ways in which NATO could develop as an alliance. A recent edition of the Washington-based "Defense Monitor" suggested:

"The US should end its military domination of Europe and should exercise wise political leadership to facilitate Russia's inclusion among the states joining a transformed and renamed European military alliance."

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe is another possibility. It is a natural security organisation that includes Russia and central and eastern Europe. Why not devote funds to boosting that arrangement instead of the present proposals?

Many analysts believe that the greatest threat to western security is the north-south divide. I have put that argument in the House many times in the past. Growing inequality, environmental disasters, mass disempowerment and poverty force the south to take ever more desperate measures to compel the west and the north of the world to notice. Economic inequalities will probably lead to increases in terrorism and sub-state terror, with which NATO is not equipped to deal.

Expansion of NATO will exacerbate the differences between the north and the south of the world. It will turn Europe into a fortress that views the rest of the world as a high-risk area, and attempts to cut itself off. NATO may not be well equipped or correctly focused to deal with

[Mrs. Clwyd]

those issues. Expansion will encourage instability, because of the increased availability of military hardware, when we should be moving towards demilitarisation.

10.3 am

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) on his choice of subject for this important debate. I compliment him on his excellent introductory speech, which set out many of the crucial issues. I should like to reassure him that he has many sterling qualities; honesty and bravery are two or them, but innocence does not spring to mind. Many of his hon. Friends know him better than the odd journalist in the odd diary column.

NATO has kept the peace. NATO is an outstanding alliance. It is NATO that has stood up for democracy. It is NATO that stands up for the self-determination of peoples. It is NATO that has kept the peace in which we in western Europe have been privileged to live since 1945. I want the alliance to maintain its strength. I want it to remain true to those central principles. I want it to have another 50 years of spectacular success to match the past 50 years, which we have enjoyed or read about.

I hope that the Minister will answer five crucial questions, which the Governments of the west must answer before embarking on the expansion of the NATO alliance. My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside and the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) referred to the first question at some length: what will the Russian reaction be to our proposed expansion? Russia is militarily weak compared with NATO and the United States. Militarily, we could expand the borders of NATO a long way east, and we could achieve that without any untoward Russian reaction.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside and the hon. Member for Cynon Valley said, we must ask whether the expansion of NATO is worth it, or whether it would so sour relations with Russia that it would undermine our aim for that country, which is the establishment of a stable, peace-loving democracy committed to free enterprise and the mixed economy that it is now developing. The best prize of all for the west to win is the creation of conditions in which the Russian peoples become ever prouder and more confident of their democracy, and through that become ever keener on peaceful relations and prosperous trade and commerce with the west.

The second question that we should ask is whether the applicant countries have stable frontiers. There has been much diplomatic work recently to resolve actual or potential tensions and conflicts between many of the countries that would like to join NATO. Before pressing ahead with any applicant's membership, we must satisfy ourselves that it has stable frontiers with its neighbours, and that there is unlikely to be a resumption of the conflicts and tensions that disfigured our continent in the 1920s and 1930s, of which my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside made such eloquent mention in his opening remarks.

I welcome the progress being made to settle the problem of the Sudetenland. I welcome the progress being made between Hungary and Romania on the presence of the Hungarian peoples beyond the borders of their country. I welcome the progress being made on Romania's borders further east, and I welcome the progress being made on the Polish border and the future of the Baltic republics. The big tensions in those areas before the second world war were snuffed out by the communist iron grip that took over in the post-war period. We need to ensure that those old tensions and conflicts have been resolved peacefully before we take on responsibility for those countries in our alliance.

The third question that we should ask is: what contribution will the new members make to our alliance? We will extend to them a most important security guarantee. I do not believe that countries can be half-members of the NATO alliance. If countries join, we are responsible for their frontiers and for the tensions and conflicts in which they may be involved. We must take care of them, just as we expect them to be responsive to our requirements. We must ask what military contribution they will make, given that they will extend the borders of NATO a considerable distance east, and that they will thereby add to the problems that the security guarantee presents. Were the world to change and were hostile powers to emerge to the east or south, we would be required to stand by that security guarantee.

The fourth question that we must ask arises from the previous question: can we defend each and every one of those applicant nations if we bring them into our alliance? That requires a clear military as well as a political assessment of any potential conflict or threat.

It is no good saying, "Today we are fortunate, because the countries bordering us are democratic and peace-loving; or, if they are not democratic, they are peace-loving; or, if they are neither democratic nor peace-loving, they do not have the military strength or capability to do us harm." I trust that all that is true, but we must ask ourselves what the position would look like in 20 or 30 years' time if things changed dramatically—if some of those countries developed more hostile intentions, if they rearmed in a way that could be more threatening, if they gained the capability to move troops, weapons or even nuclear explosives over long distances. Might we then need ever stronger defences to meet the guarantees, and provide the security that each of those countries wants?

The fifth question that we should ask is: what have we in mind for NATO's ultimate borders? The United States Secretary of State is talking in terms of inviting three of the countries that are currently geographically closest to NATO. I think that Russia will want to know whether we have it in mind to go right up to the Russian border, or to fall short of it. We should consider whether we intend to extend NATO membership ever more widely, so that we do reach the Russian border, or whether we think that consolidating our borders somewhere in central or eastern Europe is the right approach. I do not believe that the "salami" approach is a good one; I think that we need a strategic vision of how big NATO will eventually be, and that we should be prepared to speak now, whether or not we are going to invite all those countries in the first instance.

I am not entirely happy with the idea of a half-price NATO for the new members. I am not sure that a country can be a strong member of an alliance such as NATO if it does not deploy all the weapons that it might need, or that it has in reserve, throughout the NATO area. I am not sure that there should be parts of that area, particularly

those on a country's eastern frontier, where it does not exercise its troops, or occasionally practise against the evil day when it might need to use them. We have to say that, if a country belongs to NATO, it must belong fully. It must protect the confidences and secrets of the club, and show us that it can do so. We, in turn, must be prepared to conduct joint exercises, and to put in place any weaponry that might be needed to back up the full guarantee that we shall be offering by way of security protection.

The United States Secretary of State recently made an important statement through the columns of *The Economist*, and I welcome much of what she said. I particularly welcome her statement that NATO is the means by which the United States is involved in the security of western Europe, and will remain so. American support is crucial to the freedom of western Europe, and I strongly welcome it. The Secretary of State also said, however, that an enlarged NATO would mean a bigger European contribution to the European end of that defence, and I do not think that is right.

Looking at the balance of risks and contributions from the applicants for membership, I think that, if anything, their immediate entry into the alliance would weaken rather than strengthen it. That is the issue that we must consider before rushing pell-mell into NATO expansion. The alliance is still most important to our security, and we must defend and protect that. We must keep the United States engaged in western European defence, but Britain must be the voice at the table that says that every new member brings risks and responsibilities as well as a contribution. It must insist that there is a balance between those risks and responsibilities and that contribution.

In that way, we could proceed to some enlargement of NATO; but we could also guarantee that NATO remains the pillar of our defences, and remains strong enough to do the job.

10.13 am

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) on bringing this matter to the House's attention. The Government should have done so. I have repeatedly asked the Leader of the House during business questions for a full-scale debate devoted exclusively to the issue of NATO's expansion, and I hope that—rather late in the day—he will accede to my request, because many hon. Members would like to speak about such an important matter.

I agree with some of what has been said this morning about the importance of trade and commerce. I hope that a number of applicants for NATO membership will also become members of the European Union: not only would that make sense in terms of trade and commerce and the cementing of those countries' market economies, but the countries joining the European Union—whether we like it or not—will as a consequence enjoy some security guarantees. Although there is no security element in the European Union's treaties, it is inconceivable that external aggression on one member state would not be deemed aggression on the whole European Union. Such aggression could not be tolerated.

All that will come in time. Meanwhile, we have the immediate lining up of countries that wish to be considered for NATO membership. Today, hon. Members have made the mistake of talking in general terms, as if all the states involved were equal in terms of size, geographical location, the contributions that they can make to NATO and the development of their democracies. Some states would, I think, be disqualified on the last count, because democracy has not developed and flourished in those states. I feel that we have an obligation to look at each application on its merits, and I want to concentrate on the countries that should logically be the first to join NATO—those whose case for membership is the most powerful and compelling, not only in their interests but in ours. I am thinking particularly of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia.

It is a matter of fact that those countries will be given membership first, and I welcome that. I do not accept that their membership will impose additional costs or burdens on the United Kingdom taxpayer which should disqualify them. I shall return to that point shortly. I am shocked and horrified that the House of Commons should contain Members of Parliament who ignore the moral obligation that we owe to the people of the central European states, particularly Poland.

The hon. Member for North Tayside referred to Winston Churchill's speech at Fulton, Missouri, 51 years ago. He said that he remembered it. I remember the words: "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across Europe behind which we must refer to it as the Soviet sphere." Churchill implied that, for the next half century, we would say to the people of central and eastern Europe, "Look over the wall. See how wonderful things are in the west: look at the wonderful market economy. Is it not a tantalising prospect?" Those who believed our propaganda must have thought that the sun always shone and the rain never fell in the west.

What happened? Communism collapsed, the wall came down, the barbed wire was wound up, and the former communist countries developed democracies. Now they are saying, "Please may we join?" and we reply, "Not so fast; hang on a moment." That came through in some of the remarks of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). However, when he listed his criteria for membership—criteria with which, to a large extent, I did not disagree—he spoke of the principle of national self-determination, and of free peoples. Well, the people of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic are free peoples, and they want to join a free association of democratic states. We will need pretty powerful and persuasive arguments to say that they should not join—bearing it in mind that Turkey, which I do not consider to be a democratic state, is also an existing member. The membership of those countries would guarantee their democracies, although they are already robust and flourishing and, indeed, we can learn from some of their modern parliamentary institutions. We must recognise that they have a powerful case.

Poland is a nation of nearly 40 million people, and has a large land mass. It has a thriving market economy and a robust democracy. Given that it is a former Warsaw pact country, it has some pretty sophisticated armed forces, which collaborated with the British Army in training last summer. It has much to contribute in defence and military terms. We must consider the question of interoperability. Enormous strides are being made in bringing Poland into line with the NATO technology and communications systems, for instance. That can and will be achieved in a

[Mr. Andrew Mackinlay]

relatively short time. Those arguments about interoperability were never raised when Spain joined. They are trotted out now to disguise the other objection, the overriding one, with which I disagree but nevertheless view as a legitimate point: what will be the impact on Russia if we expand NATO?

I return to Winston Churchill's speech in Fulton, Missouri, when he said that we must refer to the region behind the iron curtain as the Soviet sphere. Have we fought the cold war for half a century to see the defeat of the Soviet Union, only to concede a Russian sphere of influence and right of veto over free democratic peoples? I have not, and that is why I view it as a moral issue. We should recognise that these people are entitled to come in and to enjoy collective security.

The security guarantees are important. I do not wish to devalue the guarantees under article 5 of the NATO treaty. If we took in all the applicant countries at this stage, it would devalue NATO. I am not advocating that. I am saying that we should consider their entry on their individual merits. We can extend security guarantees to Poland. Even if the House cannot be persuaded about the moral issue of admitting Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, there are overriding selfish reasons why we should do so. Demonstrably, if there ever was a day when we were threatened from the east—although, to be candid, logically it is not likely; we just have to look at the map of Europe to see that—it makes sense to move the borders of our interests eastward.

I listened to the hon. Member for North Tayside and his recollection of history. I think that his argument was that it was because of a treaty that we had to go to war in 1939. Of course, that is a matter of fact, but is he saying that it would have been better if we had not had that treaty and that, without it, we would not have had to go to war with Hitler? The problem is that it was his predecessors on the Conservative Benches who brought a new word to the English language—appeasement. He is saying today that we should appease the threat of potential aggression.

Mr. Bill Walker: For the sake of the record, I served with Polish service men. I have a high regard for the Poles. During the second world war, the Polish armoured division was based in my constituency and many of the service men in that division who returned still live there. May I remind the hon. Gentleman that it is never difficult to sign treaties? What is difficult in life is to honour what we sign. It is important that we recognise the dangers, the risks, the hazards and the commitment. If another act of aggression takes place, his children and grandchildren will have to go to war, not the hon. Gentleman. That is what happened in 1930. That is the only point that I was making.

Mr. Mackinlay: The problem was that we did not tackle aggression. We did not have sufficient treaties in place. We allowed Hitler to move on and to take slices of Europe until such stage as we had to say, "Thus far, no further." I agree with the hon. Gentleman that treaties should not be entered into lightly or frivolously and we should not make commitments that we cannot fulfil, but I return to the thrust of my remarks on Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic and Slovenia, with its geographical position on the Adriatic. It makes military and defence sense for us to have them in NATO.

In his criteria, the right hon. Member for Wokingham mentioned the need for sensitivity with regard to borders. In relation to the states to which I have referred, that is old hat. Poland, for instance, is one of the countries in Europe that has the fewest minorities. It has fewer minority problems than the United Kingdom, if we regard the problems of Northern Ireland as a minority situation. It is a matter of fact that Poland's borders are agreed with the Federal Republic of Germany. There is, frankly, no problem there.

Notice that I do not say that Romania should be in the first wave—because it is deficient in terms of democracy, the market economy and so on—but Hungary has reached new agreements and accords with Romania, which are welcome. The Czech Republic identifies in terms of trade with the Federal Republic of Germany, looking westwards, and Slovenia has recently reached agreements and accommodation with its larger Italian neighbour, so great strides have been made. Those new treaties, new agreements and new arrangements make some of the problems that we have had and still have in western Europe look much worse. For instance, Spain has problems with the Basques and the Catalans and we have problems in Northern Ireland. In contrast, there are no problems now in those other states, and that should be acknowledged.

I hope therefore that Her Majesty's Government and the next Labour Government will robustly pursue the principle of expanding NATO, ensuring that the democracy criteria for membership are adhered to. That is very important. The countries to which I referred can contribute to collective security and enhance NATO. We should not find bogus reasons or appease anyone, because that is not in the interests of ourselves, the countries of central Europe to which I referred, or Russia. It is important that we are sensitive to Russia's involvement, but it would not be in Russia's interest if we gave it the right of veto over the development and fulfilment of free democratic peoples, who were subjugated for so long in central Europe.

10.25 am

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) on obtaining the debate, which has brought forward some thoughtful and useful contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber. I invite the House to consider yet another proposition.

Western policy is now predicated on the assumption that there has been discontinuity in Russian long-term strategy, and on a naive willingness to believe that, with the resignation of Mikhail Gorbachev in December 1991, everything changed. In fact, nothing changed, other than the west's incredible abandonment of reasoned analysis and caution.

In the autumn of 1989, the Soviets launched their treaty offensive, as a result of which bilateral treaties were made between Russia and, first of all, Finland in October 1989; Canada; Czechoslovakia; France in February 1992, replacing a treaty signed by President Gorbachev in October 1990; Germany; and Greece in July 1991. Incidentally, the Greek treaty was accompanied by three parallel intergovernmental agreements, one of which covers

"the prevention of dangerous military activity",

which probably explains the Greeks' refusal to allow NATO access to Greek airfields at the outset of the Bosnian campaign, notwithstanding the fact that Greece is a full member of NATO. There were bilateral treaties also with Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain, Norway in March 1992 and ourselves in June 1992.

I wish to make three points in relation to these bilateral treaties. First, the dates of the bilateral treaties demonstrate that there was no discontinuity of Soviet foreign policy following the resignation of Gorbachev and the supposed ending of the cold war. Secondly, the text of the treaties follows a similar pattern, which is hardly surprising given that they were all drafted in Moscow. Thirdly, they complete the entrapment of the countries involved in what can be described only as a collective.

It may surprise the House to know, for example, that article 3 of the treaty between the UK and the Russian Federation states:

"They—

the contracting parties—

"affirm that relations between them will be governed in particular by their commitments under the documents of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, including the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris for a new Europe and the Helsinki Document of 1992."

Time prevents me from attempting to explain the relevance of other treaties such as the Franco-German treaty of 1963, but, from what I have already said, it should be apparent that the Russians have created a veritable spider's web of treaty obligations, which, taken together with the proposed enlargement of NATO, effectively prevents individual nations, in deference to or by dint of the collective thus established, from acting in their own national interest. By definition, a collective can act only in its own interests, not in the interests of its component parts—a fact that is amply demonstrated by the difficulties and frustrations that are experienced as a result of our membership of that other collective, the European Union.

In making up its mind on this crucial issue, the House will want to consider to what extent the protagonists of NATO enlargement have understood, or misunderstood, the dialectic. Has there perhaps been a failure to recognise that the ending of confrontation that was the cold war—the thesis—has given way to the antithesis of apparent peace out of which the synthesis, that is, the collectivisation of western security, is now emerging, and that the synthesis represents everything that the Russians have striven for—the neutralisation of NATO, which is the most successful defence alliance of all time?

In a similar debate on 8 June 1995, I warned the House about the dangers of collectives. That warning is contained in column 367 of the *Official Report* of that date. I warn the House again and conclude by citing in support of my argument Sergei Rogov, director of the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of the United States and Canada. He writes of

"advancing from confrontation to demilitarisation and on to collective security . . . to create a Euro Atlantic security area or, in other words, the comprehensive collective security system which has long been discussed in our country as the highest goal of our foreign and defence policy."

Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will say whether he entirely rejects the words of Mikhail Gorbachev, as reported by Sir William Stephenson, who was formerly Sir Winston Churchill's personal representative and director of British security co-ordination in the western hemisphere. Addressing the Politburo in November 1987, Gorbachev said:

"Gentlemen, comrades, do not be concerned about all you hear about glasnost and perestroika and democracy in the coming years. These are intended primarily for outward consumption.

There will be no significant internal change within the Soviet Union, other than for cosmetic purposes. Our purpose is to disarm the Americans and let them fall asleep".

10.32 am

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): My hon. Friends are right to say that it is essential to discuss this important matter before the events that are likely to take place in a few months. We should heed the warnings of George Kennan of the United States, whose experience goes back to the last war and who perhaps understands the issues better than anyone.

In 1995 I was privileged to visit the Vladimir region of Russia. I saw prostitutes on the streets with babies, and workers sitting in factories not because they were on strike but because they had not been paid. I also met police officers who had not been paid for several months. The leader of the communist group on Vladimir regional council said to me, "Mr. Brazier, you panicked in the west 10 years ago because of one piffling explosion in a nuclear power station. Imagine what could happen to this country with 40,000 nuclear weapons."

The Russian people feel insecure. They have been invaded four times this century—by Japan, Germany and Poland, and then again by Germany. To the south they face the threat of Islamic fundamentalism and the Chinese are on their border. They are also concerned and confused about Russia itself. In the words of one of my hosts, "How can it be right that we are now asked to produce a passport to visit Aunt Nellie in the Ukraine?" Kiev was once a Russian capital. Indeed, the Cossacks come from there and today the Crimea is the home of the Black sea fleet.

People persist in the politically correct notion that democracy is a buttress against war, but it is wholly untrue. After his military coup, Napoleon was endorsed by the largest popular vote ever given to a French leader and he plunged Europe into war. The German conquest of Belgium in the first world war was overwhelmingly endorsed by the German Parliament and all of Germany's local governments. Hitler came to power through the precarious and unhappy democracy of the Weimar republic.

Three conditions need to be fulfilled to buttress peace. The first is prosperity and, above all, prosperity based on trade between the NATO powers. My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) spoke about that. Secondly, there must be constitutional depth and stability, which is precisely what is missing from a country whose President had to order tanks to fire on his own Parliament within the past two and a half years. Thirdly, there must be armed strength in those countries which are stable and are currently members of NATO.

Time is short, so I shall not repeat the cogent arguments made by other hon. Members, but I should like to stress three final points. First, if we are not willing to go to war for the extra countries, we should not admit them. Secondly, if we are willing to do that, it means drawing a line to exclude those countries most likely to be the

[Mr. Julian Brazier]

victims of a dictator, if one were to arise in Russia or eastern Europe. Thirdly, we must always remember Teddy Roosevelt's dictum:

"Speak softly and carry a big stick."

Alas, we are in danger of doing the reverse.

Despite the Minister's close interest and the constructive meetings by the Secretary of State for Defence just before Christmas, the expansion of NATO is seen by the Russians as us shouting at them while at the same time throughout NATO, and especially among our European partners, we are steadily involved in whittling away the stick. The priority and the balance are wrong. We must think again—and the American whose words we should heed is George Kennan, not Madeleine Albright.

10.36 am

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): I shall continue where the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) left off by saying that if he is correct, it may be a shame that Madeleine Albright is the Secretary of State in President Clinton's Government because that is the Government with whom we have to deal and not nonagenarian commentators in the wings.

I congratulate the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) on this timely debate. The comments about the need for a more protracted debate were well made and I hope that the Minister will confirm that the matter must return to the House. Certainly, an enlargement of NATO would need the assent of the House and that of legislatures throughout NATO.

Before I rose to speak, my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) said to me that in view of the alliances that have been forged this morning in the House, it might be possible for any kind of alliance to come into being in Europe. Hon. Members agree that over the 50 years since the last war, NATO has been the cornerstone of our defence system. Labour certainly sees NATO in that role. We support, with qualifications, the enlargement of NATO by the inclusion of some other countries. I concede that many of the fears that have been expressed in the debate are real, but they can be dealt with and they simplify the reality of our life in Europe.

None of us can predict the future of Russia or its internal security, but it is a historical fact that more people have died in Europe over the past five years than in the 45 years that preceded them. We must treat seriously the importance of providing a security framework which considers not just the possibility of conflict on the classical post-war scale, but the kind of conflict that broke out in the former Yugoslavia and which has cost not only those who were directly involved but the world so dearly.

Within that framework, it is almost extraordinary to say that we would cede a veto to Russia because of Russian fears of NATO enlargement. Such a veto would prevent us creating the future security architecture of which enlargement is a part. I endorse the words of the Defence Select Committee, which said in its report:

"We are determined to ensure that NATO is, if not enhanced, at least not weakened by enlargement: and that it remains manageable, decisive and coherent, with a minimum level of interoperability."

Those comments are central to this debate. We must insist that NATO's future is,

"if not enhanced, at least not weakened by enlargement".

That is a primary point.

Labour believes that we should also ensure that the enlargement process takes account of Russia's very real fears. Enlargement will be pointless if it is not conducted with the necessary sensitivity and in a manner that breaks down barriers and the sources of division. We should insist that enlargement does not create new barriers. As hon. Members on both sides the House have said, we should create not only a more widely embracing framework to promote peace and stability, but one which includes a clear role for Russia, not simply as a peripheral bolt-on extra but as a central player. We must ensure that Russia is included in the wider European security framework.

I should like to express a few observations on the wider security framework. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have correctly mentioned the need for economic engagement, but such engagement of itself will not be sufficient. All the heady talk of half a dozen years ago about the ability to reconstruct former eastern bloc economies, particularly Russia's, was not matched by an equivalent effort. We should return to that theme and recognise the need in Russia for a relatively successful level of economic progress to underpin its future. We should also examine opening our markets and the roles of the International Monetary Fund and of the European bank for reconstruction and development. Those factors are central to the process.

As I have said, we must consider Russia's very real fears. In 1995 Russia began to talk about a "cold peace", having clearly heard warning bells in relation to expanding NATO in the wrong way. I also do not think that we can take it for granted that the opinion of the Russian Government will automatically be the same as that of the Russian people. We should take that factor into account and be realistic in ensuring that we do not begin a destabilisation process.

Russia obviously regarded the collapse of the Warsaw pact as the collapse of its own defence system. It regarded the dismantling of its air defence system in a similar manner and feels particularly vulnerable to attack from the west. It saw how the conventional forces in Europe treaty of 1990 became hopelessly outdated as the balance of power shifted. With the possibility of NATO expansion, the former allies of the then Soviet Union became firmly locked into the NATO system and Russia saw a massive change in the balance of power.

Mr. Redwood: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why he thinks that a threat to Hungary should be taken seriously and that we should offer it the protection of a security guarantee, whereas a threat to Lithuania should not be similarly treated?

Mr. Lloyd: The tone of my comments in this debate has been to emphasise that NATO enlargement is a component of the European peace structure, but that it is no longer the only or even the central part of that structure. We should realise that Russia would have very different reactions to the inclusion in NATO of Hungary, for example, and of the Baltic states. The forthcoming Helsinki summit between Presidents Yeltsin and Clinton will be of paramount importance in ensuring a proper dialogue so that NATO forces can allay Russia's fears.

I endorse the article by Madeleine Albright in *The Economist*, which was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). She said:

"Russia would have no veto. But its voice would be sought and heard."

She made it clear, and we endorse the view, that NATO's position must be to include Russia in the closest possible dialogue. It is not a matter of NATO versus Russia, as that is an outmoded part of the European framework. Such a framework was relevant in the cold war era, but it is not relevant in the current era. Russian participation must be central—not as a bolt-on extra, but as an essential player—in the NATO-Russian council and in NATO's overall planning structure. NATO should make permanent Russia's role within NATO headquarters. I believe that that is inevitable. We should also ensure that the charter—although we may quibble over its exact legal status—establishes clear principles by which consultation and participation will occur between NATO and the Russians.

Although I do not think that we can give any permanent guarantee, in practice the idea of nuclear deployments on the territories of potential new NATO states is unrealistic. After next year, the only land-based nuclear weapons will be those of the French and will be on French soil. I do not think that it is realistic to talk about siting nuclear weapons in Hungary, Poland, Slovenia or the Czech Republic. It is also unlikely that NATO troops will be permanently stationed in those states, although it must be said that NATO troops have recently been through—among other places—Hungary, when they were on their way to Bosnia. British troops have also engaged in exercises in Poland with Polish troops. Therefore, the mere presence of NATO troops need not concern the Russians.

We should go beyond the agenda of NATO enlargement and examine the agenda of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. At the December 1996 Lisbon summit, the Russians made clear the importance with which they regard the OSCE as a part of the overall security apparatus.

We should also consider a proper arms control agenda. I welcome Madeleine Albright's comments in *The Economist* on that aspect. We should first examine carefully the need to renegotiate the conventional forces in Europe treaty and consider lower levels of troop involvement across Europe. We must also realise that we can both achieve lower troop levels and provide mechanisms whereby long-term stability and transparency become part of the troop deployment issue.

A challenge for the British Government is to examine the role of nuclear weapons and the possibility of a third round of strategic arms reduction talks. The alternative would be to play on the concern expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House that Russia's fears could lead to a very different climate in Moscow and throughout Russia. For instance, the Russians could both refuse to ratify the current CFE treaty—in its current terms, that is quite likely—and begin a non-ratification process over START 2. The process could go into reverse. None of those consequences is necessary if enlargement is handled well by NATO and by the Russians.

If NATO is considering—realistically, I think that it is—including Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia, those inclusions of themselves will not pose a threat to Russia. We cannot allow a Russian veto over that type of NATO expansion, but we must ensure that we take proper account of Russia's legitimate fears. NATO enlargement would then be simply one part of a process to enhance overall security across Europe. Russia's role and position could be greatly enhanced if the Russians were to engage in the dialogue in which we wish to engage them.

10.49 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) on bringing up this extremely important subject. It is clearly time that the House debated the expansion of NATO and I am pleased to have an opportunity to make some short comments on the subject.

Before dealing with the specific points raised by hon. Members on both sides, I should like to make some general comments on enlargement. Why should we enlarge? With the greatest respect, my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside put the question the wrong way round. I see no way in which we could not enlarge NATO. I do not believe that it would be right for us in the west to deny the countries of central Europe the right to join an organisation which, had they not been under the boot of Soviet oppression for so many years, they would unquestionably have joined at the outset. We cannot deny them a guarantee for their security that they desire and desperately need. They have all been subjected to the traumas of war, as my hon. Friend so admirably said, and they are fearful of being so condemned again. NATO can offer a valuable cover for them; it is the best assurance for peace in that region, as it has been in ours since its foundation 50 years ago.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside rightly stressed that the importance of NATO is not only military, but political. It offers an opportunity to the countries of central Europe to expand their security, stability and prosperity. We can already see signs of the benefits of the proposed NATO enlargement. Great efforts are being made in all 12 aspirant countries to establish democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They are also trying to deal with the border disputes that many of them have had in the past. There have been great successes on that: Hungary and Romania have dealt with their dispute; Romania and Ukraine are in the process of sorting out theirs; and in many other instances, some of which have been mentioned today, the difficulties are being resolved. The pressure of the potential expansion of NATO has been effective in ensuring that efforts are made to resolve disputes.

Efforts are also being made to bring the armed forces of those 12 countries under full democratic control with transparency in defence planning. I do not believe that that would be the case were it not for the prospect of joining NATO as a result.

In the short time available, I will deal with some of the specific points that have been raised. My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside said that he did not think that military alliances or treaties were the way to establish peace. He preferred trade. I agree that the establishment of free trade internationally is a guarantor of peace and one way in which we can try to get rid of poverty and the rivalry between countries that is so often the cause of excessive nationalism, leading to war. However, as my

[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]

hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) rightly said, trade is not adequate, any more than democracy is, in itself, adequate. Military strength and the military alliances necessary to create that strength are a vital third pillar for the establishment of lasting peace.

I understand entirely the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside about what happened in Poland and our having to go to war in 1939, but it is wrong to draw the conclusion that he appears to draw that we should not have had a treaty with Poland in 1939. That would not have resulted in peace. The apparent weakness of the allies and the fact that Hitler did not believe that we would go to war over Poland caused the war, not the treaty, in which we made a guarantee that we ultimately honoured.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) mentioned several points—some of which I have already covered—and focused particularly on cost. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) that the cost is more likely to be in the $35 billion bracket than the $125 billion bracket. However, that is in the hands of NATO and it has not yet resolved how to go ahead. We shall have to watch the cost of expansion closely.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) asked five questions, which I shall try to deal with briefly. What will the Russian reaction be? Mr. Primakov's many talks with my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and with Mr. Solana and others lead me to believe that Russia will accept a limited and reasoned expansion of NATO in the first wave. Although there will be some rhetoric against it, I do not believe that there is genuine hostility to that reality, which I think that Russia accepts. However, there is genuine and understandable fear among the Russian people, who have been brought up on years of Stalinist propaganda to believe that NATO is an aggressive potential enemy. We must move with great care to ensure that those fears are assuaged and that the Russian people understand that NATO is no threat to Russia and is never intended to be so.

My right hon. Friend asked whether the applicant countries had stable frontiers. I agree that that is a primary criterion on which we shall have to decide whether any aspirant country is allowed to join. I have said that one of the advantages that we have reaped so far is that many countries are desperately trying to solve their frontier disputes so that they can join.

My right hon. Friend also asked what contribution the new members will make. That is another very important point. We make it clear to all the countries that wish to join that this is not a one-way street. There is no free guarantee given by existing NATO members. The new countries will be asked and expected to play a full role in NATO operations, and particularly peace-keeping operations. We expect them to increase defence expenditure when necessary, to bring their armed forces up to the level of NATO armed forces and to ensure interoperability. We are making great progress on all those fronts. The many joint exercises, such as Ulan Eagle with Poland last year, show how we are moving forward on that. The value of potential NATO membership is already becoming evident.

Can we defend the applicant countries? I agree with my right hon. Friend that that is a vital criterion. We must ensure that that is a realistic and feasible guarantee for every country that we allow to join NATO. We must not give a guarantee that we cannot honour. Nothing would weaken NATO more. We shall have to examine that closely.

I disagree with my right hon. Friend's comment that we should have an ultimate aim of a specific number of new NATO members. We must have a specific long-term aim to establish freedom and peace throughout Europe. That aim has never been crystallised in the past. NATO has expanded three times and I believe that it will expand again on a number of occasions. NATO is evolving continually—it is not a static finality—and we should recognise that fact in the way in which we take the matter ahead.

Many other points have been raised, and I am sorry that I do not have time to answer them all. We must expand NATO, taking great care not to antagonise Russia or to make it unnecessarily fearful. We must have a partnership with Russia and with the Ukraine reflecting their different, but equally important, concerns about their position after the first step of NATO expansion. Those processes should go ahead in parallel, and all the NATO countries are working hard on that.

We must develop other security alliances which overlap NATO. It important not to go back to a cast iron dividing line between east and west, with NATO on one side and hostile or fearful countries on the other. We must consider the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the "Partnership for Peace" programme, the status of the Western European Union and the council of Baltic sea states, all of which can play a valuable role in ensuring that NATO is not seen as the only security guarantee, with Russia and her allies outside it and some countries that we cannot allow in standing between the two blocs. That must not happen again. The only way to ensure that it does not is by enhancing and building up other security arrangements so that the dividing line is blurred until it disappears.

The American proposal that we should form an Atlantic partnership council for "Partnership for Peace" members would be a useful step forward. We must bring in Russia and the Ukraine and make sure that the Baltic states do not feel insecure. We must expand NATO cautiously, as the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) said, and make sure that there is no final status whereby some countries are left out. That is extremely important.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We must now move to the next debate.

Care of the Elderly (Scotland)

11 am

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I raise a subject of serious concern to us all. Our elderly citizens deserve our abiding support. In their day, they helped to produce the wealth of our nation, and they and members of their families fought and defeated Nazism. They now deserve to be treated with respect, so that they may live out their years in dignity and comfort.

My concern is shared by many hon. Members. Some of us believe that pensions should be linked to earnings, but our leaders inform me that that might involve higher taxes, and we should never underestimate the self-interest and greed of the middle classes. We, for our part, must continue to campaign on behalf of elderly people. The Opposition have a good record in that respect, and many Conservative Members also fight similar campaigns.

Recently, the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) introduced a debate in which she spoke powerfully about the need for a more compassionate and effective cold weather payment scheme. In advocating a better scheme, she was joined by a number of my hon. Friends.

The commitment to a belief that our elderly citizens deserve a more comfortable and decent life is shared by numerous voluntary and professional associations in Scotland, including Age Concern Scotland, one of many organisations that brief us on what needs to be done, especially for frail and vulnerable elderly people.

I am sure that all hon. Members will echo my sentiments when I say that the Inverclyde elderly forum runs a formidable campaign, ably led by the remarkable Nell McFadyen and its secretary, Donald MacDonald. We can be sure that, if they have issues to bring to our attention, and criticisms of this place and its failure to concern itself with elderly people, they will not miss us and hit the wall.

The campaign must continue, because many of our elderly people live in poverty. Some of them live in private homes that are a disgrace. I wish to focus my speech, which will not be too lengthy, as many of my hon. Friends are anxious to speak, on the residential and nursing home care of elderly people. As I said a moment ago, in some respects it is a lamentable and disgraceful affair.

Again, our concerns are shared by numerous professional and voluntary associations. I have no doubt that many of them have submitted evidence to the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, which, under the able chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey), is conducting a study into community care. I look forward to debating the findings of his report, and, perhaps more importantly, its recommendations at a meeting, or perhaps a couple of meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee. I hope that those recommendations will lead to legislative change.

Yesterday, when we were considering the legislation on the Department of Social Security compensation recovery unit, I received a briefing from Jim Eadie of the Royal College of Nursing, saying, inter alia:

"Elderly people who have paid national insurance all their lives are now having to pay for long term nursing care which they thought the NHS would fund, causing distress and anxiety to elderly people and their families."

The Royal College of Nursing argues for the provision of

"nursing and social care under one roof regulated by a single system".

There is much to be said for that.

The briefing continues:

"Instead of receiving care either in a residential care home or a nursing home, care homes to meet individual social and nursing care needs under one roof should be encouraged."

It stresses the need to

"overhaul the existing regulatory system so that new types of homes are registered and inspected by an independent nationally trained inspectorate made up of people with health and social care skills."

A similar view was expressed in "The Dementia Manifesto for the 1997 General Election" produced by Alzheimer Scotland Action on Dementia. That excellent manifesto also argues for the unification of registration and inspection. Under the heading "Legislation to unify registration and inspection arrangements for residential homes and nursing homes", it states:

"The abolition of the distinction between residential and nursing homes would enable more flexible care to be delivered without subjecting the person with dementia to distressing moves."

That is an important consideration. The Minister and his officials have a poor, if not disgraceful, record in the regulation, management and inspection of homes. In respect of the provision of residential and nursing homes, it is my view that the Scottish Office is being subjected to sustained lobbying by the private sector, which has sought to secure its position at the expense of local authority provision before the general election. I believe that the Minister and his officials are susceptible or receptive to lobbying and proposals for the complete privatisation of such provision.

I remind the House that the Public Accounts Commission is almost ready to commence a comprehensive study into the commissioning of such services; among other issues, it will examine the relative costs of provision. I understand that the report is due in the autumn. Any action that the Government take to swell the private sector and hence diminish local authority provision before the report is published would be politically motivated.

Some private sector nursing and residential homes are well managed. The residents are treated rightly and properly by trained staff who have good terms and conditions of employment. Other private homes, however, are entirely different, and the profit motive in all its nakedness reigns supreme. I was pleased that one such home in Port Glasgow was closed down. The Minister is aware of the case. It was an utter disgrace, and I was angry and ashamed to be part of a nation that subjected 18 of its elderly citizens to the behaviour of the owner of that home, who acted as general practitioner to the residents. I shall return to that point. The Minister knows that I have been pursuing it for a long time. I believe that he, his officials and his colleagues could be indicted on a political charge.

I remind the House of the appalling scandal at the Glasgow home, Glenglova. At a fatal accident inquiry into the death of an elderly resident, the sheriff was scathingly critical of regulations governing the ownership and management of such homes. As a direct result of that scandal and others throughout the land, the Minister set up a working group on residential care homes registration

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

procedures. He knows that I kept a very close watch on that working group's report. The report was published in the early summer of last year.

In a letter to me dated 24 July 1996, the Minister said:

"Following on your interest in the progress of the Working Group, I am pleased to be able to tell you that . . . the Report has been received.

As you will see from the enclosed copy of the Report, a large number of recommendations have been made. The Government have a duty to ensure that people in residential care are properly looked after and that high standards of care prevail and we therefore propose that work be put in hand now to take forward a substantial number of these recommendations straight away."

The House should note what the Minister said. I took that letter at face value, yet I am afraid that what the Government then proposed has just not happened.

A month before I received the letter, I asked the Secretary of State

"what plans he has to modify the regulations governing the ownership and management of privately owned nursing and residential homes for elderly people."

He replied:

"I can happily assure the hon. Gentleman that the report should be available to Ministers in three weeks' time, and I will come forward with our final recommendations for action with all possible speed."

He went on to say, in a fairly lengthy answer:

"We will come forward with recommendations as soon as possible."—[*Official Report*, 5 June 1996; Vol. 278, c. 606.]

Three weeks ago, I asked the Minister an identically worded question. As it is identically worded, I do not need to repeat it. Seven months on, the answer that the Minister gave was:

"The Scottish Office is currently consulting publicly on the standards and practice in nursing homes and is considering the recommendations made by the working group on registration procedures in residential care homes."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 1997; Vol. 289, c. *621*.]

The Minister should be arraigned on the charge of neglect of the interests and needs of many vulnerable and frail people. In the summer of last year, he promised speedy action, yet three weeks ago, he talked in terms of consultation. Meanwhile, some of our elderly people—not all—in private nursing and residential homes are being neglected.

I hate the thought of another Glenglova on the Minister's hands in the near future. There is to be no legislation between now and the election that would bar a professional from ownership and management of a home where he or she provides professional services to residents. No general practitioner should own, manage or be involved in the ownership or management of private homes. I would argue that the same holds for an accountant or a lawyer. Can the Minister confirm that, following that terrible scandal in Glasgow, the two services are separate, and professionals are not involved in the running of some homes of ours in Scotland?

It is full ahead on the expansion of the private sector and the reduction of local authority care. However, on the need rigorously to regulate the ownership and management of private nursing and residential homes, the Minister and his officials move at the proverbial snail's pace, which is a disgrace, and reflects very badly on the Minister. I would argue that, in this regard, his conduct is unbecoming of his office. In the seven to eight months to which I have referred, and in the period from the fatal accident inquiry until today, action could have been taken to ensure, by way of rigorous inspection and tough regulation of ownership, management and staffing of homes, that elderly people enjoyed a decent, dignified existence.

I look forward to the day when we have a more caring and sensitive Administration, who will treat the elderly as they manifestly deserve. The Government have let them down badly. I sincerely hope that the Glenglova scandal is unique, but we all know of lesser scandals that are continuing each day of every week. Our elderly people deserve more, not only from the Government but from all representatives in this place.

11.15 am

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): I suppose the term "elderly" means people who are in receipt of the old-age pension. As I qualify for that, I must declare an interest.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on securing the debate, and I agree that the elderly, particularly those who are for some reason not as fit as they would like, should be well looked after. They deserve, to use his words, to live in dignity and comfort.

I would not wish it to be imagined in this debate that people, certainly the vast majority of people of my age group and older in North Tayside, are not living in dignity and comfort. I mean the vast majority. There is no question whatever but that people of my generation and older are enjoying a quality of life of which our grandfathers and fathers could only dream. That does not mean that there are not some with problems and difficulties. There will always be some such people, and there are those with special health problems who require, quite properly, special health care. No one would dispute that.

I want to strike a sensible balance. It is nonsense, for instance, for people who claim to speak on behalf of pensioners to imagine that they are speaking on my behalf, when they never consult me about what they want to say. I believe that 90 per cent. and more of pensioners retiring retire with incomes from pensions linked to their former employment, just as we shall when we retire from this place. That is important, because it makes an enormous difference to the quality of life of the vast majority.

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): Where does the hon. Gentleman get his evidence that 90 per cent. of pensioners have earnings-linked occupational pensions to support themselves in their life styles? That is certainly not my experience from contact with pensioners in Dunfermline, west Fife and elsewhere in Scotland.

Mr. Walker: I am sorry: I shall repeat what I said. I said that 90 per cent. and more of those retiring now are retiring with such pensions. I am talking about people of my age group and younger, rather than people whom I think the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow was probably addressing, who must be at least 75 years old or older to fit into the category to which he was referring.

We have a duty and a responsibility to address such people—there is no question about that—but it is nonsense to suggest that they are the vast majority; they are not.

Dr. Godman: I did not say that.

Mr. Walker: I am not suggesting that the hon. Gentleman said that; I am responding to the intervention by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire), and choosing my words carefully.

We should recognise that voluntary bodies have an important part to play. Long may they continue to play it. I commend those who regularly look after the elderly through many and varied voluntary bodies in every constituency.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow concentrated his remarks largely on residential and nursing homes. I make no apology for the fact that I was partly responsible for initiating the inquiry into nursing care provision in Tayside. I wanted that done, because I knew that the nursing and residential homes provided by the local authorities were much more expensive than the private ones.

I visited every home in my constituency—I can speak with authority only about North Tayside—and in my judgment those in the private sector are superb. However, if the situation had arisen in my constituency that arose in that of the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow, I should have done exactly as he did, and drawn attention to it. It is unacceptable for anyone to run a home as he described, and no one would defend it.

The local authorities have a responsibility to monitor the situation, and to ensure that the private sector provides facilities of the right quality that meet the statutory requirements. If there has been a failure, it may be that the local authorities did not discharge their responsibilities as positively and accurately as they could.

We may want to tighten the regulations, and I would support any efforts to ensure that general practitioners did not own and run homes whose residents were their patients. The point about accountants was a good one. No one should operate on the inside, both making and monitoring the rules. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow and I know that the GP plays an important part in monitoring and balancing what is being provided to his or her patients.

On value for money, we should remember that taxpayers' money is involved. It is not our job in the House to have preconceived views on the only way in which provision can be supplied. Local authorities can and should provide good quality of service where possible, but where that quality can be provided for £200 per person per week less by the private sector, as it is in Tayside, it is crazy to waste taxpayers' money. We can help many more people with the same amount of money.

Surely that is the point: are we concerned with caring for old people or with making narrow political points? I agree with the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow that it is our duty to ensure that taxpayers' money, where it is used, is used to the best value.

The military often have splendid arrangements for looking after old people. I again declare an interest, as I am involved with provision in connection with the Royal Air Force, through the benevolent fund. The Army and the Navy have similar arrangements. I have been able to get help and assistance for the very category of individuals to which the hon. Gentleman drew attention: those who served in Her Majesty's forces—or His Majesty's forces, as they were in the second world war. No one with an ex-service background will ever be debarred from help.

There are always avenues to be explored. A great deal of money is available through military benevolent funds, and the tragic tales about ex-service people often come about simply because no one has gone to the trouble of making sure that the military knew the situation. Substantial help is available to anyone who has served in Her or His Majesty's forces.

No individual lives on the state pension alone. If any individuals in any constituency have only the state pension and no other source of income, they are missing out on all the other benefits to which they are quite properly entitled. I deliberately say "entitled", because I am astonished when people suggest that one should live on the state pension alone; we all know that rent can be paid through housing benefit, and that there are allowances for council tax, heating and other expenses.

We should recognise that it is part of our job as Members of Parliament to see to it that individuals in our constituencies get everything to which they are quite properly entitled, but not to suggest that the vast majority are suffering, when the opposite is the truth.

Anyone who comes to the Probus club—especially the Christmas dinner, as lunch is known there—at Forfar, or other pensioners' clubs in my constituency, will see that the quality of life in Tayside is high. Yes, there are some people with problems and some matters need to be addressed, but we should not get it out of proportion.

If we concentrate on dealing with the case that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow mentioned, and any others that may exist—there are none that I know of in North Tayside, because if there were, I would be doing something about it—we can then focus our efforts on securing the best value for taxpayers' money, to the benefit of all our people.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Walker: I am about to sit down; I believe that I have been on my feet for 13 minutes.

The local authorities should become enablers and monitors rather than providers.

11.28 am

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): The debate is not about service veterans, but I must say that many people in my constituency who served in the forces get no help from the organisations described by the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker).

Mr. Bill Walker: Tell me their names.

Mr. Martin: Some ex-service men are too proud to go to such organisations and say that they served in the war. Some people who left the services in 1945 are now suffering from dementia. I know someone in that situation. How can his wife apply to the British Royal

[Mr. Martin]

Legion, or other service organisations, when she does not get more than four hours' sleep at a time, because the man she married and has spent a lifetime with is now like a child and will not go to bed at night? The situation is not as clear cut as the hon. Member for North Tayside tries to suggest.

I declare an interest, because my father-in-law suffers from dementia. He lives in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe). On my wife's birth certificate, his profession is given as bombardier in the Royal Artillery. At one stage, we thought that he was entitled to claim for deafness, because he worked with the great guns in the desert during the war. The poor soul could not even remember his Army number to make a claim. When someone needs day-to-day provision, applying for charity is not the simple option.

I have a high regard for the military, and their work at Erskine hospital is excellent, but that is achieved through the voluntary work of men and women who have never served in the forces. As usual, the hon. Member for North Tayside is talking utter nonsense when he says that everything is fine.

The dedication of some men and women to the care of the elderly is amazing. We hear bad news from our communities easily, but we never hear the good news about the dedication that people display to the care of the elderly.

A dementia group in my constituency provides respite for those who care for the elderly. Every day, it provides lovely meals at a club in the multi-storey flats. On Saturday, in the workers' free time, it held a sale of work to raise money to take the people it cares for to Scarborough during the summer. It is good that such kindness is displayed in our communities, but we are failing as a society if friends and neighbours have to raise funds at sales of work for the men and women who fought against fascism for our right to free speech.

The way in which local authorities are attacked in the House is a disgrace. It is easy for us to say that they have gone over their budgets and are not spending their money properly, but the local authorities are in the front line of providing care for the elderly. The homes for the elderly in Glasgow are second to none, and could be filled three times over. The waiting list is enormous, because of the standard of care that is provided.

Our local authorities have built up a home help service that provides the elderly with meals and help with housework. The home helps also provide companionship for the lonely. The hon. Member for North Tayside said that most elderly people have second pensions, but it would not matter if they had three pensions if they are lonely. It is a disgrace that we allow such loneliness to continue. The only people who ever go into some pensioners' homes are the home helps. It is a disgrace that we attack local authority budgets for such vital services.

Every home help I speak to says the same about the terrible pressures on them. Sometimes they have time only to go to the post office for their patients, and to collect some messages. They have little time for conversation, but some home helps, in their own time, go back to their patients' homes at night to provide the companionship that should be provided at the taxpayers' expense. We do not need lectures from the hon. Member for North Tayside about remembering that taxpayers' money is being spent. The elderly made provision for us when we were children by paying taxes. They paid into the community, and it is time they got something out.

Some 10 years ago, the railway workshops in my constituency were closed. We have high unemployment in the area, and the men in their 50s who lost their jobs did not work again. The railway industry is well known for providing a pension, but the pensions that those men receive at 65 will not be as good as the pension that I and other hon. Members will receive.

The Springburn elderly forum in my constituency meets to discuss the issues that it will raise with me and with councillors. The hon. Member for North Tayside said that he had not been consulted, but my local elderly forum does not consult every pensioner. I as Member of Parliament do not consult every pensioner before I speak, but every pensioner knows that they are entitled to consult me.

Pensioners ask me, "Michael, what is the point in getting a rent rebate when our houses are freezing?" The Barlornock and Barmulloch estates were built in 1945 and 1947 for the ex-service men the hon. Member for North Tayside mentioned. Those young men and women brought their families up in those houses, which contain four or five apartments. No two-apartment houses have been built to allow those people, who are now elderly, to stay in the communities they love. They are stuck in big houses that they cannot afford to heat, and there is no point in giving them rent rebates. Every elderly person should have a properly heated home.

We keep hearing attacks on local authorities. My local authority has introduced combined heat and rent programmes, in which elderly people in certain houses pay rent which includes payment for heating. They no longer have to worry about the gas or electricity bill, but the Government are cutting the funds to expand that programme. We are all guilty of saying that we want to do more for pensioners, but we cut funds for the very organisations that help pensioners.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) has raised this issue. The care of the elderly should be a non-party political issue. Each and every one of us should unite to try to ensure that we provide our elderly with the dignity that my hon. Friend described.

11.39 am

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): I congratulate the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on obtaining this debate, because he does a service to the elderly in Scotland by insisting on the matter being debated in the Chamber. I, too, have had the briefing from the Royal College of Nursing, and I shall refer briefly to some of its points. No one could regard the RCN as a radical organisation; it is certainly not one given to hyperbole and exaggeration. It is concerned about three aspects of what is happening in the care of the elderly.

First, the RCN points to a serious shortfall of resources for community care in Scotland, which damages care for older people. Secondly, it is concerned about the funding system for long-term care, which undermines a central part of the welfare state. Thirdly, it is worried about the

need to provide nursing and social care under one roof and regulated by a single system. Those points should be kept in mind.

I see that the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) is here. I understand that the RCN gave evidence to the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs inquiry into community care, which drew attention to the many models of good practice in Scotland that can highlight how we can bridge the gap between health care and social care for the benefit of the patient. I understand that many of those initiatives are entered into a database of good practice that has been set up by the Nuffield Centre for Community Studies.

It would benefit us all to consider such examples. In my constituency, the Perth night care service helps people with dementia, and their carers. The project involves collaboration between social workers and community psychiatric nurses. It aims to offer help and respite to carers to prevent the breakdown of support networks—which are needed if a family member has dementia—and thereby contribute to establishing a package of care flexible enough to suit the people suffering from dementia and their carers.

I echo some of the points made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin). Like him, I speak with family experience. It is all very well to talk about the care of the elderly when it involves the able elderly, but if it involves elderly people with serious problems such as dementia, doors close. That is the experience of us all. I must tell the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) that, regrettably, that includes his wonderful military doors.

Mr. Bill Walker *rose—*

Ms Cunningham: I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman spoke for a long time, and I want to finish my speech quickly.

The difficulty that results when an elderly relative is diagnosed as suffering from dementia is a concern for anyone who has seen it at close quarters in their family. There are problems in getting the care necessary at the different stages of dementia. The tragedy of dementia is that it is progressive. At the beginning of the disease, people may be able to cope at home, but gradually it becomes impossible.

The hon. Member for North Tayside was right to say that many people who retire now may have extra pensions. However, those people will not always be 65. In our day, people live considerably longer. The older they get, the more they are faced with such long-term problems. It is precisely those long-term problems that pose the biggest difficulty for care of the elderly. Quite apart from anything else—I do not mean this pejoratively, because my father was in this position—they are the most difficult people to deal with if one tries to keep them at home, which is what most people try to do for as long as possible.

Our society and politicians have not yet thought about the implications of the increasing number of people suffering from dementia, and other problems, and the enormous stress that that is starting to cause for families, especially daughters. It generally turns out to be daughters who end up caring in the long term, once the healthy spouse has died. We need to think carefully about the matter.

In our family, we found that the situation had become so severe that my father could be admitted to a national health service bed because he could not get into any of the residential homes which then provided places for dementia sufferers. They would provide places for dementia sufferers only in the early stages of the disease. It was not until he got an NHS place that he got any real care. There was an enormous gap in provision, and that gap continues.

Bed blocking is part of the same problem. There is a mismatch between the health service and social care. In my area, some 50 people are assessed as needing residential or nursing home care but are kept in hospital because there are no places for them. That means that the NHS is put under more strain. We are getting into a vicious circle, because we have not yet grasped the nettle of care of the elderly. The situation is unacceptable, but the difficulty is that only so much funding is available. It is only when places come up that someone can be moved, because there is not the flexibility to allow expansion of the places available.

Community care should be a priority. We all know that there is much anxiety about the impact of local government reorganisation and reduced funding for the new unitary councils on the future of the voluntary sector. Regardless of what Conservative Members say, that is having a real effect on services. When I listen to Conservative Members, I sometimes feel that I am listening to ambassadors from a parallel universe, because I do not recognise much of what they are talking about. I wonder whether we are discussing the different care of the elderly in Scotland and care of the elderly on the plant Zog. For all that they say relates to reality, we may as well be. I am concerned about that.

Much has been made of private sector involvement, and monitoring. I have often heard the hon. Member for North Tayside talking about the report into the community care on Tayside. It is true that it said that private homes could provide a cheaper service than local authorities, but it did not emphasise that that would be at the cost of the pay and conditions of the people who work in the service. That is the difficulty. Ultimately, that means trying to provide care—

Dr. Godman: On the cheap.

Ms Cunningham: Indeed; I am indebted to the hon. Gentleman.

Local authority pay is one of the major factors in attracting and retaining staff with appropriate skills. They are paid approximately £5.20 per hour. In the private sector, it is unlikely to be more than £3 per hour, and in many places considerably less. In the private sector, staff often receive little training and have little prospect of advancement, but they are expected to carry out the most intimate and personal tasks for frail and vulnerable home residents. That represents savings perhaps, but only at the cost of employees' pay and conditions, and at the probable cost of the single-room standard, which is immensely important to elderly people. Their privacy is immensely important, and that cannot be guaranteed in the private sector.

There is great concern about monitoring standards. I understand that nursing agencies are subject to statutory regulation, but that does not necessarily extend to other

[Ms Cunningham]

types of employment agency dealing with unqualified staff. That adds another element of risk in the places that have become homes for the elderly. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow cited an especially worrying example of what can go wrong, and such cases will continue to arise unless regulation is addressed with great seriousness.

The private sector is expanding rapidly, but in many cases that comes at the price of lower quality. In many areas, our local authorities have provided excellent care; however, they are effectively being told that they can no longer provide that excellent care themselves, but must go out to the private sector, regardless of whether the care is as good. Local authorities are being penalised for trying to maintain high standards, and as a result our elderly people may also be penalised.

11.50 am

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I shall speak as briefly as possible, because I know that some of my hon. Friends are anxious to make a contribution to this debate.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on obtaining the debate. I pay tribute to his constant campaign on behalf of the elderly for high standards and quality in community care. I share his and other hon. Members' belief that the care of the elderly, and the way in which society in general and the Government in particular approach that care, is a yardstick by which we should all be judged. Given the way in which they have dealt with the elderly in our community, the Government should hang their heads in shame.

I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) and applaud her excellent points about the provision of residential care. She referred to the social work services inspectorate report entitled "Community Care Services For Older People in Angus, Dundee City and Perth & Kinross". I agree with her remarks about pay rates: a recent survey by the Association for Residential Care found that some of its members said that even a minimum wage of £2.50 an hour would result in a substantial rise in their costs. That gives an indication of pay levels in some private homes. If we value our elderly people, we should show our appreciation of those who care for them on our behalf.

I shall concentrate on two specific issues: choice and information. My first point is about housing: community care is built on choice, and many, if not all, of us would choose to live in our own homes for as long as possible. However, all too often the Government's actions have meant that choice is restricted to going into either a nursing home or a residential home. The Government's actions on housing have made it difficult for many people to continue to live in the community.

Let me give the example of one of my constituents. An elderly lady who had been living in the community was admitted to my local hospital for acute care. She wanted to be discharged to the community; her family supported that, as did the hospital, but it was agreed that she needed level accommodation. She was happy to give up her three-bedroomed council house to a family that desperately needed it and to move into sheltered accommodation.

The problem, of course, was that no sheltered accommodation was available, because of Government policy on the provision of public housing by local authorities, Scottish Homes and housing associations. I had intended to quote appalling statistics on the gross lack of sheltered and very sheltered housing in Scotland, but that would take up valuable time.

My second point relates to the crucial importance of information to enable people to remain in the community. The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) commented on how no one should be allowed to exist—and it would be mere existence—on a basic state pension, but the Government have done little to encourage elderly people to claim the benefits to which they are entitled.

It is reckoned that there is £14.10 a week in unclaimed income support for every pensioner in this country, and that between 12 and 15 per cent. of pensioners who are entitled to housing benefit fail to claim it. To make matters worse, housing benefit forms have increased in length, from four pages in 1988 to 16 pages today, and the single short claim form for attendance allowance has been replaced by two different forms of 12 and 24 pages respectively. Even the Clerks of the House might feel that that amount of paperwork was excessive.

Many Opposition Members were deeply disappointed by the Government's failure to extend the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996 to people over 65 and so assist them in independent living. I pay tribute to Scotland's 700,000 carers, of whom 600,000 care for elderly people. Of those carers, 28 per cent. are themselves elderly—for example, in my constituency, I met a 70-year-old lady who cared for her 81-year-old disabled sister and her sister's blind husband.

Mention was made of the issues of dementia and general practitioners. The Government have ensured that GPs are increasingly overworked through having to provide GP care and cover to nursing homes that house hundreds of people who would previously have been in hospital. I applaud the remarks of the hon. Member for North Tayside about the importance of early diagnosis, especially of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Mr. Bill Walker: It was the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) who said that.

Ms Squire: I apologise to the hon. Lady for that mistake.

Yesterday, I was pleased to learn of the announcement of United Kingdom licence approval for the drug Aricept, which is the first ever drug treatment for the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. However, it is not a cure, and its effective use depends on early diagnosis by GPs. Given that GPs are already overworked, that will be extremely difficult.

I agree with the remarks about registration and inspection. I was shocked to discover that Tayside health board does not make nursing home inspection reports available even to local authorities, let alone to the families and individuals who are facing one of the most difficult decisions of their lives.

When does the Minister intend to ensure that inspection reports on residential homes and nursing homes are freely available and accessible to members of the community? Which of us would take a major decision—one that will affect our lives and our finances—without being able to

pick up detailed reports and information documents on the subject, take them home, look them over and discuss them with our families?

I shall end my speech there, so as to allow my hon. Friends to make their contributions; but I would add that I look forward to being part of a Government who are truly committed to community care, and to decent and dignified care for the elderly people of our country.

11.59 am

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I shall be brief, because I know that my colleagues wish to speak. I join those who have congratulated my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on securing this important debate. It has raised many issues, and we would have liked more time, but we are doing our best to make our point.

The Select Committee on Scottish Affairs is studying community care in Scotland, a great deal of which is devoted to the elderly. All our evidence is now in, and will be published. I hope that we have time to finish the report, but if not, I hope that the new Government will pick up the evidence and produce the report. It is important for our elderly and for the disabled.

I will cut my remarks because of a lack of time, but I want to put on record what has been said in "Kaleidoscope of Care", a publication from Her Majesty's Stationery Office. In just a few words, it gets to the heart of what is important about care for the elderly. It says:

"Officially, what most would consider admirable policies are in place. The aim is to support carers, encourage independence, foster co-ordination, and emphasise comprehensive but responsive assessment. But if these aims were really being achieved, would it be so difficult to achieve home help? Would the supply of occupational therapists be at its current low level? Would the systems for discharging the elderly patients from hospital be as haphazard as they now appear to be? Would so many old people continue to have what, by the standards of most in our population, are very low incomes and poor housing? Much good work is done in the community care of old people, but it is patchy. Unless resources for community care are considerably increased, the patchiness will remain and reforms will merely benefit one group of old people at the expense of another. We have seen that effective community care for elderly people is possible. Is there the political will to provide it?"

That publication is well worth reading and considering.

I do not have time to go into detail or to mention all the figures, but I want to give hon. Members an understanding of the extent of the problem. It is a general problem, but I will give the figures for the whole of Ayrshire.

In Ayrshire, 6,332 people are receiving home help. Drastic cuts in the provision of home help are likely to occur at the next budget of all the councils in that area. That will leave many people without that essential help. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) said, some people see nobody from week to week, or even year to year, and their only contact with the outside world is their home help. It is an essential part of their life.

Ayrshire has a larger share of people in nursing homes than other areas, because many people wish to come to our nursing homes. Many large buildings have been turned into nursing homes. There are 2,174 people in nursing homes, and 1,017 in residential homes. The total of those receiving community care services in Ayrshire is about 24,000. I cannot give an exact figure, because some people are listed twice if they are receiving different types of care. That is a large part of our population. When one considers the extent of that care and the many people it helps, one can see that any cuts in expenditure would be sad.

I understand that I walk a tightrope between what I can discuss here and what has been heard in evidence to the Select Committee. Much of the evidence received by the Select Committee is private and cannot be mentioned now. However, the report will be worth reading by those interested in this matter.

On the day on which the Minister of State, Scottish Office, the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas–Hamilton), was giving evidence to the Select Committee I was handed a letter from Maggie McLeod of Edinburgh Voluntary Sector Community Care Alliance. The letter said:

"Edinburgh city social work department has stopped assessing people for care services"—

all people, not just the elderly—

"and has a waiting list of 1,372 people."

That list includes those who might need admission to residential homes. The letter said that, currently,

"admissions to residential homes have been frozen."

I wonder whether the Minister took that up in his constituency, or whether he has any further information. The fact that 1,372 people in Edinburgh are on a waiting list for an assessment, which may take between 12 and 16 weeks before they receive the care they need, is something that any civilised society should find unacceptable. Edinburgh city council would say that that has happened because of cuts in its budget. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that.

I would have liked to say much more, but time does not allow me. It is only fair that I should sit down and allow others to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

12.5 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) gets some answers from the Minister this morning. I shall be brief, so as to allow the Minister to respond.

On residential care, we have heard about the disgraceful incident at Glenglova. I believe that there should be national minimum standards for residential care to ensure healthy eating, suitable heating and opportunities for entertainment beyond a television parked in the corner of the lounge. I agree with the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) that decent pay for the employees is important in the standard of care.

I want to take an unusual step and congratulate the Prime Minister on helping to warm up a pensioner in Maryhill. She telephoned me to say that she woke up in her cold house and opened her morning mail, only to find a letter inviting her to contribute £20 to the Tory party election fund. She was so indignant that she warmed up immediately. She pointed out that £20 is equivalent to the Christmas bonus for two years. I agree with the pensioners charter that that whole issue should be looked at once again.

Transport for the elderly has not had an airing yet. Local authority provision for bus passes varies widely across the country. We should aim to achieve minimum

[Mrs. Maria Fyfe]

standards for the transport of the elderly at low prices. If people are to keep in touch with the community and enjoy life to the end of their days, transport is important.

There are clear signs that an overwhelming majority of the population feel that it is wrong that elderly people should be cold in the winter. They are prepared to pay to ensure that our elderly are not cold. They do not mind paying the taxes. The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) talked about taxpayers' money, but I have never met a taxpayer who objected to old people being warm in the winter, and who was not prepared to pay a fair share.

12.8 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on securing this rare debate on Scottish health and community care on the Floor of the House. It is the first such debate during the eight months that I have been on the Front Bench and for many months before that.

Our thoughts this morning as we discuss this subject are with the elderly people in Leith who are ill with E. coli. I am sure that all hon. Members want to send them and their relatives their best wishes this morning.

The latest shocking outbreak highlights the urgent need for an all-out war against E. coli in Scotland. First, research must be supported and prioritised. Secondly, the recommendations of Professor Pennington must be implemented in full, including the recommendations on butchers' shops. Perhaps the Minister could assure us this morning that the full report will be completed soon, and that there will be a debate on it on the Floor of the House in March.

One of the lessons from Lanarkshire was that information must be made available at the earliest possible moment. I have been asking questions about that last night and this morning, and shall continue to seek more detailed information about possible delays on Monday and Tuesday in Leith.

The conflict between commercial considerations and the interests of consumers was evident in Lanarkshire and elsewhere, and makes even stronger the incontrovertible case for an independent food standards agency, as advocated by the Labour party.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow raised many important issues. He referred to payment for nursing home and residential care. We believe that that issue is so important that it will be referred to a royal commission when Labour comes into government. Nothing less will do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow and the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) raised the possibility of bringing nursing and social care under one roof, regulated by one system. That is supported in the dementia manifesto. The suggestion must be given serious consideration, as it seems a helpful way forward.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow and the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) homed in on the Tayside report into the provision of residential care in the council and private sectors. The Government are trying to make the running on the matter, and suggest that local authorities could save money if they spent more in the private sector.

I welcome the fact that the Accounts Commission is studying the matter. Judgment should be reserved until that report is available. At present we can consider two factors—first, that quality is the key aspect, and secondly, that staff wages and conditions must be taken into account, as they appear to be the most significant factor in the cost variation. We should remember that the Tayside report makes it clear that there could not be a quick transfer to the private sector, even if it was desirable. We must also bear in mind the fact that, if all provision was in the private sector, the private sector could hold a council to ransom. The rates charged might be much higher in that situation.

There has been significant growth in the private nursing home sector, and it has been unplanned and unregulated. There are no common standards across Scotland, and there is no common registration and inspection framework. The problem was recognised by the Scottish Office as far back as January 1994, in response to a sheriff's verdict in the Highland region. The sheriff stated that there was no common standard that he could apply when giving a verdict on a particular nursing home.

In January 1994, the Scottish Office set up a working group to consider criticisms of the Nursing Homes Registration (Scotland) Act 1938, and to consider how the problems might be overcome by the issue of a national standards document, accompanied by client-specific guidelines. It is hard to believe that, after more than three years, we have no conclusions from that working party. We still do not have a regulatory framework that is applied consistently throughout Scotland and seeks to provide quality and protect the vulnerable. Perhaps even more shockingly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) pointed out, the reports that are compiled regularly on nursing homes are not available to the public or to local authorities.

The Government like to run on the health versus local government issue, and keep telling us that they are prioritising health rather than local government. The debate reminds us that the distinction is unrealistic, because local government is crucially involved in the delivery of health via community care. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West alluded to housing, which is also crucial to the delivery of health. The distinction between local government and health is phoney and worthless.

Social work is crucially involved in community care. This year £42 million was taken out of the grant-aided assessment figures for social work by the Scottish Office. Next year £55 million-worth of new burdens in community care must be met by councils across Scotland, at a time when their cash grant from the Government is being reduced. That has resulted in the current problems in community care. There is the dead person's shoes policy, whereby people cannot get places in nursing homes unless someone in the nursing home dies. There are further problems, such as the delays in community care assessment and the decline in home help.

Bed blocking has arisen because of the pressure on social work and community care budgets. That problem is exacerbated by the decline of almost 3,000 in the number of acute hospital beds in Scotland this decade,

the lack of step-down beds even partially to fill the vacuum, and the cut of almost 2,000 this decade in the number of long-stay beds available. Furthermore, there are no clear eligibility criteria for those beds. We shall address the problem as a matter of early priority.

We are not opposed to all bed closures. The theory of community care is that certain beds should be closed, with the transfer of resources into the community. That is welcome in respect of people with learning disabilities and of many psychiatric beds, although there are problems with the number of acute psychiatric beds. However, the transfer of resources should be made more transparent. There should be a standard method of recording resource transfers to make them transparent and traceable.

The scale of the bed closures, combined with the bed blocking problems, has led to the many health stories this winter about pressure on acute hospital beds. Ten days ago, we were told that all hospitals in Lanarkshire were having difficulties in coping with medical admissions. Throughout January, there was a red alert in Lothian, where only emergency cases were admitted to hospital, yet throughout that month it was openly stated in Lothian that 100 beds were blocked because it was impossible to find a place in nursing homes for those people. Bed blocking affects not only people who want to get into hospital and people who should be in another, more appropriate place; it also affects waiting lists, because surgical beds must be used to provide extra medical beds.

That is one reason why the most recent health statistics, which came out in December, show that waiting lists in Scotland were at record levels, at more than 82,000. The Government message on waiting lists is quite the contrary, but that is just one of the many phoney claims that they make about the health service. It is as empty as their claim to be cutting bureaucracy in the health service. I am glad that the Secretary of State and the Minister for Health have been a little more coy about making that claim since the health statistics were published in December.

The annual health statistics made it clear that bureaucracy in trusts soared last year by more than £13 million, or more than 5 per cent. Perhaps even the Government are now a little shy of claiming that they are cutting the costs of and the waste in NHS bureaucracy caused by their internal market.

We want a full debate on the health service to discuss bureaucracy and the Government's plans to increase privatisation and commercialisation in the health service in Scotland. We had a new angle on that at the Scottish Grand Committee last Monday, when the Health Minister admitted that the Government would not rule out plans to privatise clinical services under private finance initiative arrangements.

We press the Government for a debate on the Scottish health service before the general election. We do not seem to be able to secure such debates under the present system of government. This is the first debate on Scottish health on the Floor of the House that I can remember. If we had a Scottish Parliament, we would ensure that Scottish health received the attention that it deserves.

Let us have a health debate at least in the Scottish Grand Committee before the general election, so that we can return to the important issues that have been raised this morning, and discuss the waste of bureaucracy and the threat posed by further privatisation and commercialisation. I ask the Minister to confirm this morning that the Government will grant that debate. If the Prime Minister wishes to appear before the Scottish Grand Committee, he may lead that debate. If the Government do not allow time for that debate before the general election, everyone will conclude, correctly, that they have nothing to boast about and everything to hide.

12.20 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): There have been several health debates, and we will welcome others whenever the opportunities arise.

This morning the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) referred to the three cases of E. coli 0157 in Edinburgh. I extend my sympathies to the patients and families concerned, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman's three constituents make a speedy and full recovery. The hon. Gentleman has had the benefit of a briefing from the local consultant in public health medicine and the deputy chief medical officer at the Scottish Office, so he should be familiar with the up-to-date facts.

I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that the latest cases have been taken seriously by Lothian Health and by the city of Edinburgh council environmental health department. Urgent investigations are in hand to identify the source. As a precautionary measure, a butcher in Leith, from whose premises all three patients bought cold meat, has agreed to close his shop. Anyone who had bought cold meat products from the shop since 10 February was advised through a press release last night to dispose of them. A helpline has been established to give advice to anyone who is worried about the situation.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether there had been delays in informing the public. The first case was confirmed on 20 February, the second on 24 February and the third yesterday, and action was taken to investigate each case as it occurred. It was possible to identify a likely common source only after all three cases were studied, which is what occurred. As soon as the possible source was identified, immediate steps were taken to inform the public in the way that I have outlined.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the implementation of the interim Pennington report. I assure him that the comprehensive action announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretry of State to the House on 15 January is well in hand. Although the debate is not about E. coli, I shall mention some of the on-going action.

First, a consultation paper on selective licensing of premises handling raw and cooked meat products was issued. Secondly, a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Cairns Smith is reviewing the existing Scottish Office guidance on the investigation and control of outbreaks of food-borne disease in Scotland. Thirdly, the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food is reviewing its guidance on cross-contamination.

We are also taking urgent action to improve our arrangements for surveillance, data collection and analysis. I appreciate the other points that the hon. Gentleman made, and there will be a further statement to the House as soon as the Pennington inquiry reports its final recommendations.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): As this is a particularly Scottish problem and Professor Pennington is one of the world's leading experts in this area, will the issue be researched properly, so that we may get to the root of the problem?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Professor Pennington recommended further work in two areas: knowledge of the prevalence in livestock of the type of E. coli that caused the central Scotland outbreak, and more accurate laboratory methods of typing E. coli strains. We are pressing ahead urgently with turning those recommendations into research projects, in consultation with the relevant research bodies, including the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food. United Kingdom health departments have also initiated a programme of research, costing more than £2 million.

I must respond to the points raised in this significant debate. We have heard some good speeches. An additional £15 million was allocated to health boards on 9 December 1996 to alleviate the problem of bed blocking, and I believe that it helped considerably. The findings of the acute services planning assumptions review showed that beds were being blocked principally because of delays in care assessment processes and budgetary pressures on social care.

I have the figures for local authorities in Scotland. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) referred to the position in Edinburgh. Edinburgh's community care provision has increased by 9 per cent. this year, which is above the national average of 8.5 per cent. Substantially more resources have been allocated to community care in 1997–98.

Research shows that most elderly people wish to remain in their own homes where practicable. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) asked about national standards. A working group is in the process of developing national standards for nursing homes, and guidance on standards in residential care is being prepared and will be issued for consultation very soon. I am glad that the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs is studying the matter, and we shall respond to its report as soon as we receive it.

I assure the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) that our aim is to provide a safe, seamless service to the user, involving care and support from a multi-disciplinary team, multi-agency working and the private and voluntary sectors, in order to meet the needs of constituents. We believe that the mental illness specific grant, which includes dementia and head injury cases, is important. Some £18 million has been allocated in that area in support of 370 projects.

We believe that it is important to develop respite care, and we have increased funding to £5.1 million. We are assisting organisations such as Alzheimer's Scotland and other voluntary organisations with a grant of almost £300,000.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) raised the issue of choice of accommodation. We encourage local authorities to improve choice by increasing the number of providers. Following consultation with local authorities, we shall issue directions on information that we hope will enable them to make the best decisions. The hon. Lady mentioned the publication of inspection reports. That is currently a matter for health boards, but there is no bar to such publication. I shall reflect upon the hon. Lady's comments. I would prefer that the maximum amount of information be made readily available, but I shall consider that point further.

The hon. Lady said that the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996 does not extend to those aged over 65. It was considered that authorities should not be overburdened in the development of direct payment schemes in the first instance. However, we have undertaken to review the matter during the first year of operation. People who are already receiving direct payments will continue to do so after their 65th birthdays.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), who initiated the debate, raised some extremely important matters arising out of Glenglova. Ministers have responded positively by setting up a working group comprising representatives from local authorities and the voluntary and private sectors, as well as user representatives. It has made many recommendations, but I make it clear that many of them—notably, preventing a general practitioner from being a home owner as well as a resident's GP; a single registration system of residential and nursing homes; and improving the registration system—require legislation. They also raise some complex issues.

I give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking that we shall make a statement next month about our intentions regarding many of the working group's recommendations and related matters. We have in hand draft guidance to authorities covering the many topics noted in the group's report, which will go out to consultation next month.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to consultation on core standards. That matter is separate from consideration of the issues arising from Glenglova. The Government have issued model guidelines for the registration and inspection of nursing homes for the elderly, for people with dementia and for those with learning disabilities. All health boards are expected to comply with the national guidance.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) raised the issue of carers and respite services, and I acknowledge the debt of gratitude that we owe them. The sums made available have increased to £5.1 million for this year.

The hon. Member for Leith mentioned charging. I can tell the House that we intend, in the near future, to issue for consultation the draft Community Care (Residential Charges) Bill, which will enable those who require residential care immediately, or who may require such care in the future, to protect more of their capital above the current disregard limit of £10,000.

We intend the Government to act in partnership with those who wish to protect their assets, and we are committed to the principle of cascading wealth within the family. The Scottish Office issued guidance to authorities on 16 January about discretionary charging—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. We must move to the next topic.

Ice fall (Aircraft)

12.30 pm

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me this opportunity to raise an important issue concerning the responsibilities of the Department of Transport and the Civil Aviation Authority.

It is part of the historic traditions of the House that a Member of Parliament can raise on the Floor of the House an injustice that has befallen one of his constituents. This is just such a case.

On 15 June 1993, at 9 o'clock in the morning, my constituent, Mr. Constantinos Kashieris, was in his garden in Isleworth when a block of ice the size of a sack of potatoes fell from an aircraft. He subsequently suffered a serious injury. His general practitioner, Dr. Kaikini, of 19 Harvard road, Isleworth, reported that when Mr. Kashieris

"was in the back garden of his house and was about to enter the house through the back door . . . a huge piece of ice fell off a passing aircraft and crashed on to the spot he was standing moments before."

The ice shattered.

Dr. Kaikini continued:

"The shock made him jerk violently and fall against the back door, injuring his right shoulder."

All shoulder movements were limited thereafter. Mr. Kashieris

"was given a course of NSAID and was . . . referred for Physiotherapy."

As a result of persistent pain in the shoulder and limitation of movement, he was referred to

"Mr. G. E. T. Raine, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon at the West Middlesex University Hospital, on the 30th of November 1993. X-ray of the right shoulder taken on 23.11.93 was reported as showing a translucent line running along the upper surface of the glenoid fossa,"

resulting in a fracture.

"Mr. Kashieris was seen by Mr. Raine on 24.12.93 confirming the limitation of the range of movements of the right shoulder. He was offered M.U.A. of the shoulder. He was reviewed again but the movements of the shoulder did not show any improvement."

Because of his complaint, he was seen again in the surgery on 27 March 1995 and 24 April 1995.

Now nearly in his 80s, Mr. Kashieris has been battling with the CAA and British Airways for more than three and a half years to get compensation and recognition of his injury. What has been the reaction of the CAA, which should have been more assiduous in pursuing this case? In a letter dated 15 September 1993, the CAA told him:

"I am pleased to advise you that our investigation is now complete.

Examination of the relevant Air Traffic Services movements record identified a number of aircraft in the vicinity of Isleworth at the reported time of the event. It has now been established that one of those aircraft had a defect which could have resulted in the build-up and subsequent shedding of ice in flight. The operator has now taken appropriate action to prevent a recurrence.

The aircraft in question was a Boeing 747, registration G-AWNA, which was operating British Airways flight no. BAW218 into London Heathrow Airport on the morning of 15 June 1993. Therefore, any further correspondence regarding this event should be addressed to British Airways".

Much to my surprise, I then received a letter from British Airways on 27 February 1995, referring to Mr. Kashieris's case, saying:

"It seems that the information given in the Civil Aviation Authority's letter of 15 September 1993 is incorrect in that the CAA were referring to a fault found on one of our aircraft which arrived at Heathrow on 15 July 1993. A technical log is completed following every flight and it seems from the logs of aircraft operated by BA and in the vicinity of Isleworth at the relevant time on 15 June 1993, there is no record of any reported fault which could have caused a large block of ice to fall."

I find that very unsatisfactory. In effect, Mr. Kashieris has been told that he is not entitled to compensation because he did not note the aircraft's registration number as it passed over. That is mind boggling. Aircraft do not have their registration numbers on their undercarriage or the underside of their wings—only on their side and tail. Was Mr. Kashieris expected to carry a pair of binoculars while suffering from the shock of a large block of ice that fell near him, injuring his shoulder, to look at the aircraft's tail fin to try to get the registration number?

The CAA says that it cannot identify the offending aircraft. Of course it can. At Heathrow airport, the landing and take-off times of each aircraft, its route and guide path, are logged. National air traffic control services have a recording system to determine—the gap between each aircraft is one to one and a half minutes—which aircraft is coming or going, on which route and at what time. Additionally, because of the need for environmental protection, noise monitoring systems and microphones are placed all over the airport and its surroundings to monitor at precise times the aircraft that are flying overhead. All those aids should have been used to identify which aircraft was responsible for the block of ice.

As well as having his arm broken, my constituent has suffered from poor nerves, stress and sleepless nights since the incident. I repeat that he is an elderly gentleman nearly in his 80s. His case has been going on for the past three and a half years. The time taken to-ing and fro-ing between solicitors afterwards—all to no avail—has not helped either.

The CAA initially said that it was able to identify some 30 aircraft and that it was a British Airways flight. British Airways has denied that. The CAA should be able to identify exactly which aircraft was to blame, because the exact time of the incident was recorded by the Metropolitan police from the call that was made to report it. They have an official logged entry, recording the time the areoplane flew over Mr. Kashieris's garden in Isleworth. Just how many areoplanes could have been responsible? Surely it cannot be beyond the wit of the CAA to find out which one.

My constituent has been told that he would have to identify the aircraft before trying to claim compensation, but that is akin to telling the victim of a hit-and-run accident that the police cannot do anything to help unless the victim gives them the registration number of the car. If one is to apply commonsense logic or common law logic to this matter, to ask Mr. Kashieris to give the registration number of the aircraft, which is what the CAA is telling him—that is impossible for him to do—is absurd.

As things stand, Mr. Kashieris has been denied justice, and the same thing could happen again. How is anyone to identify an aeroplane when they have just been knocked to the ground by something that has fallen from it? I must

[Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva]

put on record the letter that I received from Sir Malcolm Field, chairman of the CAA, dated 4 December 1996, which is what prompted me to ask for this Adjournment debate. I was incensed by it, and by the fact that Mr. Kashieris had been battling on his own with some help from me for the past three and a half years.

The letter says:

"Dear Mr. Deva,

Thank you for your letter of 15 November 1996 concerning your constituent, Mr. Kashieris.

The Civil Aviation Authority believes that it has done everything reasonably possible to assist your constituent in this matter and accordingly does not propose to take any further action."

Mr. Kashieris had got fed up and had tried to take the CAA to court. Sir Malcolm Field says:

"Since your constituent has commenced proceedings against the Authority in relation to this matter, I do not believe it would be appropriate for me to comment in any more detail."

The CAA had more than three years to find out who was responsible for this accident, to enable Mr. Kashieris to obtain compensation. It did nothing except give the wrong date, the wrong time and the wrong flight when it accused British Airways of being responsible. That is not good enough.

I have also received letters from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport regarding this matter. I would argue vigorously that the Civil Aviation Authority exists not only to promote the aviation industry, but to protect the people who live around airports and who suffer injuries because of aircraft. I speak as an aeronautical engineer: I am not anti-aircraft. I am one of the few people in the House who understands the constraints and difficulties of running an airport or an airline, but I recognise that people have suffered as a consequence of living near a huge airport such as Heathrow. It brings benefits to the locality, but it also brings disbenefits.

The CAA should strike a balance between the promotion of the aviation industry and its attendant benefits, such as jobs, and its responsibility to safeguard the local community and to protect it against the disbenefits of pollution, noise and ice falls. In one of his letters, my right hon. Friend said that 20 such incidents have been recorded, one or two of which have resulted in injuries being sustained.

As a Member of Parliament for a constituency in which many people have to put up with overflying aircraft, I appeal to the Minister and to the House to ensure that the CAA either is empowered to do more in this regard or, if it has the power to make inquiries, does so efficiently and carries out its remit according to legislation.

12.42 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. John Bowis): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) for raising this important issue. We are sorry to hear of the distressing incident that affected his constituent, Mr. Kashieris, and his difficulties in seeking compensation. My hon. Friend has been zealous on behalf of his constituent, and I congratulate him on that. He is right to suggest that when public bodies, be they Government or other agencies, deal with members of the public who have problems, or with Members of Parliament, a degree of sympathy and courtesy is in order. I am sure that those who need to do so will have heard the message that my hon. Friend has put on the record.

My hon. Friend said that Mr. Kashieris has instituted legal proceedings against the Civil Aviation Authority, so he will understand that I cannot go into the details of the case. Nevertheless, I can address the general points that he has raised, and attempt to explain the cause of the phenomenon of ice falling from aircraft, the frequency of such events and the risks that such occurrences pose to third parties on the ground. I shall also refer to the investigation of ice falls to try to identify the aircraft responsible, and will set out the steps being taken to reduce the number of such incidents.

My hon. Friend referred to a figure, which I must update, because it has risen a little. In the past 10 years, the average number of ice falls has increased from 21 a year between 1986 and 1989 to 25 a year until 1996—that was probably the figure to which he referred—when there were 33. We do not know whether that is due to increased public awareness of the need to report ice falls or to a genuine increase in the number of incidents. However, aircraft movements since 1980 have risen steadily from about 2 million a year to more than 3.5 million, and the underlying rate of ice falls has been fairly steady in the past six years.

Apart from the problems experienced by my hon. Friend's constituent, my Department is aware of only one incident in which an ice fall resulted in injury. On that occasion, the damage was second-hand, in that the householder was struck by debris falling from the roof of her house after it had been hit by ice, and she suffered bruising as a result. I should like to assure my hon. Friend and his constituents, who have a great number of aircraft passing over their homes, that the risks posed to third parties from ice falls, although real, are very remote.

Ice falls occur when ice that has built up on the outside of aircraft breaks free and falls to the ground. The main cause of ice build-up is faulty water systems on board large public transport aircraft. Leaking fluid from such systems gradually seeps out and freezes in the very low temperatures encountered at the normal cruising altitudes of large aircraft. When an aircraft so affected descends through the freezing level on its approach to land, any ice that may have built up during the flight begins to thaw, and consequently breaks free and falls to the ground.

Ice build-ups can also be caused by water in the atmosphere coming into contact with aircraft in certain meteorological conditions. Such build-ups can become detached, either by the activation of the aircraft's de-icing systems or as the aircraft descends or passes through a layer of warmer air.

The latest figures on ice falls were published by the Civil Aviation Authority in December 1996. They show that two thirds of reported ice falls involve the type of ice associated with aircraft lavatory installations, otherwise known as "blue ice", and that the remaining incidents involve other water system leaks or atmospheric water.

Owing to their potentially hazardous nature, ice falls are reportable occurrences under the Air Navigation Order, so they must be reported to the CAA when they occur. The problem is that people inside the aircraft—the crew or maintenance personnel—are seldom aware of an ice fall. Most reports of ice fall incidents come from members of the public who either have witnessed the result of an ice fall or, like my hon. Friend's constituent, have been affected by it.

Until last year, the CAA investigated all reports of ice falls when a specific time and location were given. Those investigations have, however, had a fairly low success rate, owing in part to inaccuracies in the information given regarding the time of the event, and, in part, to the difficulties of identifying aircraft water and waste system defects.

Although the CAA is satisfied that when leaks are identified on UK-registered aircraft they are recorded in the aircraft technical log, it is clear that a proportion of possible defects are not identified. There are several reasons for that. Some faults cannot be identified on aircraft while they are on the ground, because the aircraft are not pressurised. In other instances, the servicing agencies employed to empty water and waste systems do not have enough technical expertise to identify evidence of leakage or ice accretion. Because of those difficulties, and despite the considerable time and effort spent on attempting to trace the aircraft responsible for ice falls, the success rate has been only about 8 per cent.

In an attempt to improve the investigation process, and in recognition of what my hon. Friend rightly described as the potentially very serious nature of ice fall incidents, investigation of such events is now carried out by my Department's air accidents investigation branch. My hon. Friend will appreciate, however, that no investigation can be undertaken unless an accurate time for the ice fall is known. Even then, successful identification of aircraft responsible for ice falls depends on a number of factors, such as the amount and nature of air traffic at the time of the occurrence. The task of identifying responsible aircraft is not made easier by the fact that ice falls occur at times when many aeroplanes are waiting in holding patterns to land at the larger airports.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, it is difficult to identify aircraft—and that is certainly true when the person concerned is lying on the ground, having been knocked over. As my hon. Friend said, that person cannot be expected to have a pair of binoculars to hand, enabling him to identify the number on the aeroplane. Even if he gets the time spot on, as may well have happened in this instance, it is not always simple to identify an aircraft that may have been in the vicinity at that time.

As with any other accident, if those affected by ice fall can identify a party responsible for the accident, compensation may be sought through the civil courts. Under section 76 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982, claimants do not have to prove negligence by the airline concerned; insurance can, and for the most part does, provide cover for damage to property.

The CAA is responsible for the safety regulation of aircraft registered in the United Kingdom. Before aircraft can be entered on the UK register, the CAA must be satisfied that they meet the appropriate standards for design and construction. For new aircraft, those standards are set by the European joint aviation authorities. Responsibility for the safety regulation of foreign-registered aircraft rests with their own state of registry, but they must comply with the internationally agreed minimum standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

Where problems with ice fall are likely to have safety implications for aircraft themselves—problems such as a leak in a forward lavatory on certain types of aircraft, which could result in the shedding of ice into an engine—the CAA has issued mandatory airworthiness directives on maintenance and inspections. The CAA also recommends that investigations of water and waste system leaks should be included in routine inspections.

Aircraft constructors and operators are well aware of the potential implications of ice falls, and that is taken into account in the design of water and lavatory systems. For example, there is now a tendency to use vacuum systems on new types of aircraft, as service experience has shown them to be more reliable than the recirculation systems more commonly used in the past.

With respect to aircraft currently in service, CAA airworthiness directives have been issued for a number of aircraft types, requiring mandatory leak checks to be carried out regularly by operators, and, where necessary, appropriate remedial action to be taken. The CAA has advised all UK air operators certificate holders of the importance of taking preventive maintenance measures to minimise the likelihood of ice falls. Other steps being taken include the fitting of manufacturers' modification kits to improve resistance to water leaks at servicing points, routine visual inspections by airline engineers for evidence of ice accretion after an aircraft has landed, unannounced inspections by CAA surveyors checking airworthiness standards—including inspections for ice accretion and water leakage—the recording of occurrences by the CAA, and investigation of serious events by the air accidents investigation branch.

We recognise that ice falls have the potential to cause death or serious injury to third parties on the ground, but there are no reports of that in the United Kingdom, and the risk to people on the ground, although real, is very remote. Nevertheless, I well understand my hon. Friend's concern on behalf of his constituent, who appears to have been one of those "very remote" examples. He will be reassured by the fact that my hon. Friend has raised the matter here today, and that it is taken seriously by the Government, the Department of Transport and the CAA. We will certainly ensure that the record of today's proceedings is drawn to the CAA's attention.

The issue has been raised in the past with the Select Committee on Transport, and is kept under review. The best reassurance that I can give my hon. Friend and his constituents is that the aviation industry is taking practical steps to combat the problem, and to prevent such incidents from happening at all. When they do happen, ways must be found of identifying who is responsible—that does not necessarily mean "culpable"; it means that someone somewhere is in charge of an aeroplane that has deposited the ice.

I repeat that those aboard the aircraft concerned may be the last to know about such incidents. We should not jump to the conclusion that the captain and cabin crew should be aware that something has happened, and report it; that is not a practical solution. Whenever possible, however, people should be able to identify the aircraft that is likely to have caused the problem, so that it can be pursued—not literally pursued through the air, of course.

The CAA believes that current operating procedures, combined with good maintenance practice, will be sufficient to control the hazard posed by ice falls. I join my hon. Friend in hoping that that is the case, and in expressing sympathy to his constituent.

Hedgerow Protection

12.59 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The House will probably agree that, through the generations, the English landscape has brought pleasure and inspiration to many thousands of people. Our literature and our art have benefited from it and the quality of life of many millions of people has been enhanced. The hedgerow is an important part of that landscape and, given the confusion that exists and has existed for some time, it is reasonable that the House should consider the matter carefully.

I first became interested in hedgerows long ago, but in the early years of my parliamentary service, I took a particular interest in the protection of species. I then began to realise that it was no good protecting species if the habitat was destroyed. For almost 10 years, I served as chairman of a committee concerned with the natural environment in Europe and I played a part in setting up the Berne convention, which most civilised countries in Europe have signed and begun to implement, and which the Government ratified quickly and implemented through the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

During the deliberations on that Act, my hon. Friends the Members for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and I sought hard to persuade the Government to ensure that hedgerow protection was included in the measure, but they declined. Just before then, I had made one attempt to secure hedgerow protection, by urging the Government to extend tree preservation orders, for what they are worth, to cover important and significant hedgerows. The Government declined. *[Interruption.]* I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow has just returned. I mentioned him a moment ago.

After the 1981 Act, I secured and prepared a Bill with the assistance of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds to protect some hedgerows—those that we felt were significant. It had all-party support; frequently, such initiatives have not been of a partisan nature. Only the Government have been obstructive. That Bill would have provided a sensible framework for protection, but it was rebuffed by the Government. It would have protected the skeleton of hedgerows that we needed to safeguard—all hedgerows by highways, footpaths and bridleways, and hedgerows that were boundaries of farm and of parish—but the Government said that the problem had ended, that the destruction of hedgerows had virtually ceased and that there was no need for legislation. Destruction went ahead. Thousands and thousands of miles of hedgerow have gone since then.

At about that time, Mr. Colin Seymour was conducting research in west Yorkshire and I did some in south Yorkshire. I then realised, as did he and other people, that the pre-1840 Inclosure Acts were significant and important and had been foolishly disregarded. If one assumes that the average area in each of the 4,000 parishes was 1,500 acres, that means that there were almost certainly 45 miles or so of hedgerow in those inclosed fields, formed from the commons. The invariable requirement in those Acts was that the fields formed from the common land and given to local landowners—fields taken from the people—were to be surrounded by thorn fences or hedgerows, and protected from then on and for ever.

Obviously, changes have been required, but Parliament allowed those Acts to be neglected. When I first raised the matter in the House, a junior Minister with responsibility for agriculture said that those old Acts no longer applied, but they do, because only that which Parliament says can be taken away can be taken from that which Parliament gives. Some time later, I asked the Minister to declare locus standi or to issue a statement to clarify the matter, because people should not be left in confusion.

I said to one of the Ministers responsible for agriculture at the time—Earl Ferrers, who is now a Minister in the Department of the Environment—"I suspect that, in the 20 or 30 years until now—from the time of the Agriculture Act 1947, I think—it is highly likely that taxpayers' money has been given to people to grub out inclosure hedgerow, which the law says should be protected." The Minister was quick on his feet and replied, "Yes, but it is not our fault. It is the applicant's fault. The applicant for such a grant should be satisfied that he is entitled to remove the hedge." I suspect that many of them received grant when they were not entitled to it. One should be a little more careful with public money.

The laudable scheme to give people grant to replant hedgerows may have been used to remove them, when they had been protected by the House—the protection was given a long time ago, but it is still valid. I hoped that the Government would see sense and come to an arrangement with the conservation bodies and hon. Members on both sides of the House who were concerned about the matter.

I was on the council of the RSPB when its centenary celebrations began at King's Cross station. British Rail had named a railway engine "The Avocet", the emblem of the society. The society inappropriately invited the then Prime Minister to be the guest speaker, and what a splendid speech she made. She called in clear and specific terms for us to recognise that we were the custodians of our natural heritage and that hedgerows should be protected as a matter of importance.

I was delighted because I was presenting my Bill again, amended to suit the wishes of the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union, that very afternoon. I did not go off to the junket tea that followed the session at King's Cross station, but came to the House to present the Bill, with the words of the Prime Minister echoing in my ears. Conservative and Labour Members alike gave support. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith), who has been stalwart in defence of the proposal.

The Bill came up for Second Reading, and guess what happened? On the instructions of the Prime Minister, the Whips were instructed to block the Bill. Hon. Members may imagine that there was some acrimonious correspondence, and comments were made in Committee afterwards.

Therefore, hedgerow protection continued to be ignored. Destruction continued apace, with the Government's encouragement, and some ruthless landowners let their side down badly, but the Government recognised that their position was not particularly popular, so in 1992 they presented in their manifesto, as the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment will confirm, a clear pledge to introduce hedgerow protection. Nothing happened.

Then the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) was drawn in the ballot. Although he did not secure all-party support and did not try, he presented a Bill. Unfortunately, some Conservative Members who are not here today savaged the Bill in Committee. The Bill was defended by my colleagues and me. It came back to the House and it was talked out by Conservative Members. I was accused of making a bad-tempered speech, and I did, because I did not like the way in which a few people were apparently defending their rights and privileges against the interests of the majority of this generation and past generations, and those to come, who should continue to have the uplifting of spirit that the hedgerow in Britain provides as part of our essential landscape.

In 1987, I tried again and presented a Bill, again with the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House. The Government were going to take a neutral position, but the Bill was blocked on two occasions by individual Conservative Members, one of whom—a Welsh Member and former Minister whose constituency I have forgotten—when challenged by conservationists in his constituency, said that my Bill would have stopped people trimming their garden hedges, which was completely untrue. I retaliated in Committee shortly afterwards, by objecting to his presence on the ground that he was illiterate.

Some years before those events, I invited conservation bodies to mount an inclosure hedgerow case, because the last relevant one was in the 1920s. It was Pratt *v.* Garrett and it confirmed our position. The national bodies did not embark on a test case, but Yorkshire wildlife trust, of which I am patron, assisted by Mr. Seymour, or the other way round, started an action to safeguard a clearly protected inclosure hedgerow in Flamborough. In July, the judge declared locus standi. Some time before that, the Government refused to make a declaration, which would have saved much money and bother. As I was sure that we would win the case, I asked the Government to consider the position if the judgment on the Flamborough hedge confirmed our view and whether draft regulations, which were being prepared, would take proper account of a favourable judgment. Unfortunately, they did not.

The judgment was delivered in December. The Minister is a barrister and must have respect for that judgment, which was a masterly piece of historical appraisal. It was superb in law and should be highly regarded. That distinguished judgment confirmed that 4,000 Inclosure Acts relating to 4,000 parishes invariably required that the common land be inclosed in fields and be perpetually surrounded by hedgerows, which should be properly maintained. Instead of properly respecting that judgment, the Government said that every case would have to be fought separately.

Does the Minister want 4,000 Flamboroughs before the courts? Unless the Government are reasonable, I shall encourage every county trust and every local naturalists group and conservation group to carry out some homework in their libraries. That is already happening because of the Government's inertia. Let us have 10,000 Flamborough judgments. The legal system does not want that and there is no need for it. The commonsense approach that I urged in 1982 should have been applied before and ought to be applied now.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): The hon. Gentleman is aware of my support for his general thesis. Is he aware that, although we have not reached the end of the second month of the year, in Warwickshire 3,500 m of hedgerows have been stripped away in a very short time, some of them in Sherbourne in my constituency? Warwickshire wildlife trust, an admirable body which works hard, thinks that some farmers and landowners are deliberately trying to pre-empt Government moves in the right direction.

Mr. Hardy: I think that that is the case. The Government made their promise in 1992 and have not done anything about it other than to offer the recent proposals. As a result, much of what the hon. Gentleman mentions has been going on. I am glad that he referred to his county trust. I hope that it is checking to see whether any of the hedgerows that he mentions are inclosure hedgerows. If they are, legal action of the type that I mentioned could be taken.

The Government thought long and hard and it took them years to produce draft regulations. I am worried about them because, for example, they give local authorities 28 days to decide whether a hedgerow is worth having. It seems to have escaped the Government's notice that local authorities do not have much fat. By and large, they are leaner and more efficient than the Department of the Environment, but their officers are not able to drop everything and spend up to 28 days checking hedgerows. What on earth are those officers to do when there is snow on the ground? How can they carry out an ecological assessment and check the plant species in a hedgerow when they cannot see them? Has it escaped the notice of the Department of the Environment that many plants die down in winter and cannot be counted?

As I said, council officers are supposed to carry out an ecological assessment, to see whether a hedgerow and the number of species in it are sufficient to meet the requirements, but there are other silly requirements. Tree species in hedgerows have to be pure bred. The Minister knows south Yorkshire and has made some unsuccessful political forays into it in his time. In that area, the hedgerow oaks tend to be hybrids of pendulate and sessile oaks. Although they are hybrid, they are natural to our area. Unfortunately, I cannot find any pure-bred oaks in my constituency. I walk the footpaths regularly and I think that the oaks there are hybrid.

Sycamore cannot be included, but that species has been growing in Britain for many years. I think that chestnuts are also excluded. Some imported plants can be counted, but not native brooms or currants. It is absurd that we have waited so long for regulations, which are defective and which place local authorities in an impossible position. I pay tribute to my local authority. I understand that it met Yorkshire wildlife trust a few days ago, when it recognised the law and appreciated that it has a responsibility to comply with it. I hope that local authorities in Yorkshire and elsewhere will draw up lists of inclosure hedgerows within their metropolitan or county boroughs. Such action would be useful and responsible, and it would assist and provide guidance for future generations.

Although I am not a conservation scientist, I urge the Minister to have detailed conversations with the learned and expert conservation bodies, to ensure that some of the farcical measures in the draft regulations are put right. The Government have days—it should be hours—until the election, to act sensibly and at least seek to fulfil their

[Mr. Hardy]

1992 promise. In the five years since then, hedgerow destruction has proceeded apace, and perhaps illegal action, to which the Government have turned a blind eye, has been taken. We do not want any more blind eyes: far too much damage has been caused to the British landscape over the past 40 or 50 years, and the Government bear a heavy responsibility for much of it. I hope that in their last few days they will act in a way that will allow us to breathe at least a slow sigh of relief.

1.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): I welcome the opportunity to respond to this debate, on an important subject. I appreciate the long-standing interest and experience of the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) in the subject.

I am grateful for the chance to outline the stage that the Government have reached on the regulations to protect important hedgerows. I shall deal first with inclosure hedgerows and the case involving Mr. Colin Seymour. The hon. Gentleman spoke about the recent court case over an inclosure hedgerow in Flamborough, which sparked some public interest and involved Mr. Seymour as a plaintiff.

I understand that the Flamborough hedgerow was widely acknowledged to be of little value as a wildlife habitat and in poor condition. His Honour Judge Cracknell, to whom the hon. Gentleman paid generous and accurate tribute and who is a distinguished judge, described the hedgerow as "a singularly undistinguished hedge". Nevertheless, Mr. Seymour obtained the judgment that he sought, that Flamborough parish council remains bound by the terms of the Flamborough Inclosure Act 1765 and the subsequent award to maintain the hedge for ever.

There was a great deal of speculation at the time that the judgment confirmed that all inclosure hedgerows are protected. That is far from the case, according to a reading of the judgment. A number of factors must be taken into account. First, because the parish council withdrew from contesting the case, the judge heard only one side of the argument. Secondly, in the case, there was no disagreement between the plaintiffs and the parish council that the hedgerow was the subject of the Inclosure Act, nor was there argument over its location and ownership.

More significantly, although the judge made it clear that the obligation that was created by the Flamborough Inclosure Act 1765 and the subsequent award still existed, it is worth quoting from the closing words of his judgment:

"Can I, before granting this relief, express one word of caution. As I indicated, there are over 4,000 such Acts and each one may be expressed in subtly or seriously different ways. Whether a provision is binding as I find this one to be, has to be judged in each individual case. It would be wrong therefore to read too much into this case in terms of its significance for roadside hedgerows generally or for the ability of individuals or organisations to claim the support of the Courts for a particular hedgerow."

Mr. Hardy: I have examined many inclosure measures, and, although I accept that there could be individual variations, every single one that I have seen and every single one that I know about—over the years, many have been drawn to my attention—specifically and clearly contained the Flamborough conditions, which I mentioned. I would not dream of suggesting that every one of the 4,000 measures contains the conditions, but every one that I know of does.

Mr. Clappison: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's experience in those matters. However, the judgment demonstrates that obligations arising under Inclosure Acts and awards may still be enforceable and that, in appropriate circumstances, the court may find that a local resident has sufficient interest to challenge the failure of an owner to carry them out.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to hedgerow regulations. The Government's policy on hedgerow protection is based on the results of a survey of hedgerow changes in England and Wales between 1990 and 1993, which the Department of the Environment published in July 1994. The survey showed some welcome trends. The rate of hedgerow removal, for example, more than halved, to approximately 3,600 km per year, compared with 9,500 km per year between 1984 and 1990, which was the period covered by a previous survey. Furthermore, the rate of gain from new planting increased to 4,400 km per year, so that gains now more than balance losses from removal. The Government therefore wish to focus protection on the most important hedgerows, for which no new planting is a substitute, and which remain vulnerable to removal. One example is an ancient parish boundary hedge.

The Government therefore took powers, under section 97 of the Environment Act 1995, to introduce regulations for the protection of important hedgerows. The views of both environmental and conservation bodies and of those who would be subject to the regulations were considered, and research was commissioned to develop and field test a set of evaluation criteria that could be used in the scheme. Draft regulations were consequently published—on 21 October 1996—for consultation, with a closing date for responses of 2 December 1996. In announcing the publication, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said that he considered that the proposals struck the right balance between providing effective environmental benefits and minimising the impact on farmers.

The proposal was for a notification system, under which landowners would be required to notify the local planning authority of their intention to remove a hedgerow. It would then be for the authority, using the set of evaluation criteria, either to give or to refuse consent to the removal. There were provisions for a right of appeal for the applicant against an authority's decision and for criminal offences relating to hedgerow removal in contravention of the regulations.

A fundamental component of the protection scheme is the set of criteria that authorities are to use in identifying hedgerows of significant historic, wildlife or landscape value. For the scheme to operate in as transparent a manner as possible, and to limit objections to any decisions made, it is important that the criteria be applicable on a national basis and not rely on local discretion. A degree of detail is necessary if those who will be affected by the regulations are to have confidence in them.

Concerns have been expressed over the percentage of hedgerows likely to be identified as important under the system. We have said that the figure is likely to be about

20 per cent., although I must acknowledge that that estimate is based on a limited field study. Therefore, a more realistic figure will become apparent only once the scheme has been established.

Many of the bodies representing environmental and conservation interests have said that a higher percentage of hedgerows should be protected, or even that protection should be extended to all hedgerows. Conversely, bodies representing landowning interests have suggested that the percentage should be lower. It would be wrong to put a percentage on the number of hedgerows that we should like to be protected. The number will become apparent only once the scheme is in operation. We are far more concerned to ensure that the removal of important hedgerows is controlled.

More than 500 responses were received to the consultation, representing a wide range of views and raising a number of issues, which the Government have had to consider carefully. Differences of view were inevitable over the proposals, although we have been encouraged by the fact that most respondents supported the framework of the proposed notification system.

There are detailed matters to be considered, and we must take them into account when making any necessary amendments to the draft regulations. We are also mindful of the fact that the primary aim—to protect important hedgerows—should not be compromised. The effort to define the terms of protection for hedgerows, in a manner that is sufficiently precise to provide certainty for both landowners and local authorities, has proved significantly more difficult than expected. In the very near future, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hopes to make an announcement of our proposed way forward. Meanwhile, today's debate has made a positive contribution.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What is the difficulty with the definitions in the 1981 Act? My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and I were involved in that 100-hour Committee stage.

Mr. Clappison: The responses that we received in the consultation period identified some important questions on detail in the regulations. It is necessary to examine the criteria very carefully, because a great deal rests on their detail. However, I am sure that, in its way, today's debate is an important contribution.

Mr. Hardy: I started my speech by mentioning the landscape. I should like to make a point that is concerned less with the landscape than with general ecology.

The Minister will be aware that a vast number of bird species—such as the song-thrush and, this week, the bullfinch—have been recorded as suffering enormous decline. Many of them are hedgerow species. The Government say that their measure might be relevant to only 17.5 per cent. of our hedgerows. If we are to concern ourselves with only 17.5 per cent. of our hedgerows, arresting the decline in species that were once common in England will not work, and there will be a continued decline and perhaps a disappearance of many species that our grandparents regarded as common, but which our children and grandchildren will never see.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman certainly makes his point on the wildlife conservation value of hedgerows. In framing the draft regulations, we believe that we have borne that value in mind.

Sir Dudley Smith: Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the point that I made about those who are trying to pre-empt the scheme? I very much welcome the scheme. Will he do something about those who wish to pre-empt it?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend again makes an important point. However, I think that he will agree that, on such an issue, it is important to get the details right. We have made it clear that, through the regulations, we aim to protect important hedgerows.

Mr. Dalyell: I tabled a question on songbirds to the Department of the Environment. Consequently, after limited publicity, I received letters from across the country. There is great public concern about the disappearance of familiar songbirds. Other than a lack of food—especially a lack of food before winter—and differences in stubble treatment, the vast increase in sparrowhawks seems to be a factor in their disappearance. Hedgerows give some protection against sparrowhawks.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We are certainly concerned about the songbird population and are dealing with its decline in a number of ways. He will know that, on a wider plane, our biodiversity action programme embraces some songbird species. He will also know of the work that we are conducting through the pesticides forum, to give one example, to address that issue, which may affect songbirds.

We have had some well-informed contributions today, which have moved forward the debate on this important subject.

Pensions (Mr. Reg Vincent)

1.29 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North–West Norfolk): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to raise this important debate about my constituent, Mr. Reg Vincent. The purpose of my debate is twofold: first, to consider his old-age pension contributions and secondly to look at the value of his former Rhodesian—now Zimbabwean—police pension.

To put everything into perspective, it is important to consider Mr. Vincent's history. I should like to run quickly through his war service and the years that he spent in the British South Africa police in Rhodesia. In 1940, as a young man of 18, Reg Vincent volunteered for the Royal Air Force. He was accepted into the RAF on 11 June, when France was in the process of falling and Britain was standing alone. They were desperate, bleak times, but, like many other determined, patriotic young men and women, Reg wanted to fight for King and country. That is why he volunteered. He did his basic training and, in November 1941, he was posted to South Africa to help train the South African and Rhodesian pilots and ground crews. He set sail from Liverpool, wearing a red poppy, on 11 November 1941.

In due course, Mr. Vincent was posted to 27 Air School at Bloemfontein, where he served for a number of years. On 20 December 1944, he was involved in an unfortunate and tragic accident. Along with other ground staff, he was working on an aircraft that had been on some trestles. Mr. Vincent and his colleagues had carried out that routine procedure hundreds of times. On that occasion, due to the negligence of the senior corporal in attendance, a trestle was removed prematurely and Reg was crushed under the aircraft frame. Due to the negligence of a mechanic, the tail oleo leg had not been topped up with hydraulic oil, which meant that when the aircraft crashed down on Reg Vincent, the damage and injuries were worse than they would otherwise have been. He suffered bad fractures to his first and second lumbar vertebrae, resulting in him being hospitalised for eight months. For five months, he was encased in a full-length plaster of Paris cast an inch thick. Imagine that in the hot, humid South African climate.

Mr. Vincent has borne the legacy of that terrible injury for the rest of his life. He returned to the United Kingdom after the war, much later than he would otherwise have done. His demobilisation was delayed until 6 September 1946. His great ambition after the war was to join the Kent police. He had set his heart on that, but unfortunately he failed his medical, which was a devastating blow.

Reg then saw some advertisements that were in police stations and other public places to join the British South Africa police in Rhodesia. The Government wanted a large number of service men to seek posts in colonies to take pressure off jobs and housing in the United Kingdom. He applied and had three days in which to agree to take up the post. In those three days, he had to sort out his life and all his personal arrangements before setting sail for Africa once again.

Mr. Vincent arrived just before Christmas 1946. After his training, he was posted to Bulawayo. He then entered a period of tough policing in the former colony of Rhodesia. During that time, he had a number of traumatic experiences, which the Minister knows about. I shall not go through them in detail, save to mention that he shared a room for a while with a sergeant who was charged with a jewellery theft. That sergeant was convicted, but he committed suicide, as did the inspector in charge of the case. We should consider the impact of that on a young police officer who had gone abroad to serve the Crown. At about the same time, his engagement to his fiancée, who was waiting in England to come out to marry him, was called off. He then married a local girl in Rhodesia. Unfortunately, that marriage broke down—although I am pleased to say that he is now happily married again—and he then went through a difficult time in his personal life, the relevance of which will become clear.

We should bear it in mind that this was no ordinary policing assignment. It was a difficult, remote posting where the responsibilities and demands of policing were different from those in other parts of what was then the British empire. In due course, Mr. Vincent was transferred to Umtali, where he served until 1967. He had a distinguished career in the British South Africa police in Rhodesia and was awarded a number of medals, in addition to those that he won during the war.

The unilateral declaration of independence was made on 11 November 1965. We must consider the position of officers such as Mr. Vincent and other servants of the Crown at that time. The British Government—and, indeed, the world—were stunned by that unilateral declaration of independence. The Governor of Rhodesia remained the lawful Government of the colony and issued a directive calling on the judiciary, the armed services, the police and other public services to carry on with their duties, maintaining law and order and the normal functioning of Government services. The then Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, said in the House:

"I believe that the Governor has made this statement in Rhodesia—that it is the duty of public servants to carry on with their jobs, to help to maintain law and order".—[*Official Report*, 11 November 1965; Vol. 720, c. 362.]

He repeated that several times, as did Lord Pearce, in the judicial committee of the Privy Council.

Before the granting of independence to Zimbabwe in 1980, when Her Majesty's Government re-established the lawful colonial status, the public services had operated under a tacitly accepted compromise in which they retained their loyalty to the Crown and worked under the directive of the Governor, which was never rescinded, but were paid by the illegal regime of Ian Smith. Reg Vincent, like many others, decided to obey the suggestions and instructions of the then Prime Minister to stay in Rhodesia and to maintain law and order. If they had not done so, there would have been a complete breakdown and lawlessness in that country, and the ultimately smooth transition to independence for the relatively successful country now called Zimbabwe would not have been possible.

Reg Vincent left the police in August 1967. After a period as a deputy sheriff, he returned permanently to the United Kingdom in 1982. Rather than coming straight back to the UK, he decided to stay in the country that he loved and tried to help the police in the exercise of their duties.

Let us consider Mr. Vincent's pension contributions. He is now aged 75 and receives 71 per cent. of his old-age pension. He missed the years 1948 to 1968. He first contacted the Department of Social Security overseas

branch in October 1974, when he first realised that he should have paid national insurance contributions in the intervening years.

The Minister will be aware that matters relating to the number of contributions an individual makes are decided by the Secretary of State, through a senior officer in the office for the determination of contributions. Reg Vincent had a great deal of correspondence with me and with the Members representing constituencies where he previously lived. He wrote to his Member of Parliament in Wallasey, now Baroness Chalker, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies). To cut a long story short, the Secretary of State took the decision on 26 September 1994. There was a formal determination under section 17 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 and the statement of grounds of the decision was published on 19 April 1995.

The decision was devastating for Reg Vincent. It found that there had been ignorance and error which was attributable to Mr. Vincent's failure to exercise due care and diligence. In June 1995, Reg Vincent, a representative of the citizens advice bureau and I met the then Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), who is now Secretary of State for Wales. In fact, it was his last day at the DSS, although my right hon. Friend did not know that and nor did we, but we examined the case in great detail and had a valuable and constructive discussion.

The case was then taken over by my hon. Friend the Minister and we had a meeting about nine months ago. On 3 May, he wrote me a letter stating:

"In his submission of 8 March 1996 Mr. Vincent has indicated that he was prevented from exercising due care and diligence because of his ignorance of the National Insurance scheme and the communications problems which existed in Rhodesia at the time he entered the country. However, reasons as to why he could not exercise due care and diligence are irrelevant as the question to be considered was whether due care and diligence was exercised or not."

It took me some time to work out what that meant. Anyone reading it objectively would probably have the same difficulty. The letter concludes:

"Mr. Vincent did not take any positive action to find out by enquiry the conditions of entitlement to pension. He therefore failed to exercise due care and diligence".

I do not accept that. The Minister states that Mr. Vincent has a right of appeal to the High Court. How can such an individual appeal to the High Court when he is not eligible for legal aid and he is aged 75? The trauma, stress and huge expense are prohibitive, so it is not a practical solution.

We have to consider whether Mr. Vincent exercised due care and diligence. The DSS informs me that when the compulsory national insurance scheme was introduced in 1948, there was a huge amount of publicity. All the colonial administrations were told, there were broadcasts and people in public service in those countries were told exactly what the requirements were for participating in the new scheme of compulsory national insurance.

Reg Vincent has assured me that he did not hear the news. He was posted in Bulawayo and then went on to Umtali. He had difficulties in his personal life at the time and was shouldering his responsibilities as a police officer, upholding law and order in remote locations.

We are talking not about a police officer in Australia, New Zealand or Canada where communications were better and there was ready availability of news from the United Kingdom, but about someone serving in remote locations in Africa. Reg Vincent has assured me that he did not receive any information whatever during the period up to UDI. The Minister has accepted that, during the period of UDI, Mr. Vincent would not have heard what was going on in the United Kingdom because there was a news blackout. He asked about the previous period and asserted that Mr. Vincent should have heard about the scheme had he exercised due care and diligence.

I have discussed the matter at great length with Mr. Vincent. He is a man of great honour and integrity. Had he known, he would have taken the relevant steps. He did not know and, as a police officer serving in very difficult locations, he was never given the opportunity to find out. UDI was declared in 1965 and there was a communications embargo. Radio stations were jammed and there was absolutely no way that he could have received the relevant information that would have prompted him to take the necessary steps to make up his contributions.

My constituent has served his country with bravery and courage. During the war, he suffered an appalling injury, the legacy of which he carries to this day and has plagued him all his life. He wanted to join the Kent police. Had he done so, he now would be a relatively well-off retired man with a good police pension. However, he did not. He went to serve the Crown in Rhodesia. He might well have been excused for believing that, as members of the armed forces had their contributions paid, so did the police force who also wore the Crown on their service dress hats and helmets. Incidentally, had Mr. Vincent decided to ignore the Prime Minister's advice to stay in Rhodesia after the declaration of UDI, he would have joined a number of fellow police officers and returned to the UK, and in turn obviously paid his contributions.

We have to consider the circumstances surrounding the case. That is why I am asking my hon. Friend the Minister to review the decision. There is a compelling case for him to send it back to the Office for the Determination of Contribution Questions. I am asking him to show common sense and compassion on a matter within the remit of his Department.

Mr. Vincent also receives a former Rhodesian, and now Zimbabwean, police pension, worth 1,750 Zimbabwe dollars per month. It was worth a reasonable amount in 1980 when the Zimbabwe dollar was worth 80p. Mr. Vincent was getting about £16,800 a year, which is a reasonable pension. Since then, the Zimbabwe dollar has fallen dramatically. It is now worth precisely 4p. So his Zimbabwean pension, instead of being worth £16,800 per year, is worth £1,152. That is a loss of £15,648 a year. The loss of his Zimbabwean police pension since 1980 because of the fall in the exchange rate, in addition to what he has lost by not receiving a full pension here, comes to a staggering sum amounting to more than £17,000 a year. In total, Mr. Vincent has lost some £250,000.

I am keen that my hon. Friend the Minister should consider as a matter of urgency the Government's attitude towards Reg Vincent and the other Zimbabwean pensioners who are resident in the UK. I understand that the figure that we are talking about is approximately 1,800 people, including widows. It is very strange that, when the constitution of independent Zimbabwe was enacted in 1979-80, the Government did not require a public officers agreement, which had been an essential requirement for

[Mr. Henry Bellingham]

the granting of independence to other colonies and which invariably contained a guarantee of the sterling value of pensions. I cannot blame myself for that; I was not a Member of Parliament at the time. Nor was my hon. Friend the Minister. The matter should have been considered at the time, looked at during the Lancaster house negotiations and addressed in the drafting of the constitution of the new Zimbabwe.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to take up the matter with his colleagues in the Foreign Office—I shall certainly be doing the same. Although from a strictly legal point of view, Her Majesty's Government may have no liability to Zimbabwean pensioners, there is an extremely strong moral case. Under the provisions of the Overseas Pensions Act 1973, the Government took over payment of pensions of overseas pensioners in India and virtually every other former colony. It would have been perfectly legally possible for the Government to enter into an arrangement with the Zimbabwean Government under that Act. Such an arrangement would not cost a great deal of money—probably about £3 million. As we are paying a very large amount of aid to Zimbabwe—we paid about £30 million a year over the past four years, considerably more before then and probably more in the future—I urge the Minister to consider the strong moral case for rectifying the grievance of this proud and honourable man.

I have never raised an individual constituent's case in an Adjournment debate before. It is quite rare for that to happen. I would not do so unless I felt very strongly about Mr. Vincent and believed that he was an honourable, honest man. There is a chance to correct the problem. Mr. Vincent is a proud 75-year-old; he is asking not for handouts but simply for justice.

1.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) has raised the issue of Mr. Reg Vincent with me personally, in correspondence and at a meeting, and with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales when he was Minister of State in the Department of Social Security. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his success in obtaining this debate to raise the issue once again. No one could have pursued a constituency case more vigorously. I join him in paying tribute to all those who served so bravely in the second world war. Nobody should ever underestimate what they gave to this country.

It is worth considering first how a person establishes a claim for a contributory pension such as a retirement pension. There are two aspects to it: first, the need to satisfy the statutory conditions appropriate to the benefit, which in the case of Mr. Vincent does not raise any issues, and secondly, the establishment of contribution conditions—that a person has paid sufficient national insurance contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk set out much of the procedure.

Questions of contributions are reserved for determination by the Secretary of State for Social Security. His power to make such determinations is contained in section 17 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. Such decisions are made on his behalf by the Office for the Determination of Contribution Questions, which acts under the principles set out in the well-known case of Carltona. The Secretary of State delegates the responsibility to senior officers in the way in which my hon. Friend described. Such determinations by the Secretary of State are binding on the independent adjudicating authorities, and the right of appeal to the High Court lies by way of case stated on a point of law. In a suitable case, judicial review may be sought.

Mr. Vincent was abroad when the present national insurance scheme started in 1948. He did not return to live permanently in England until 1982, although he visited the United Kingdom in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. While abroad, he was not required to pay national insurance contributions, but was entitled to pay voluntary contributions for a retirement pension. No inquiries were made of the Department until October 1974.

There are strict time limits for voluntary contributions. Mr. Vincent was advised that he was entitled to pay arrears of contributions from December 1968, which he paid. He continued to pay contributions until he reached pension age in March 1987. On his 65th birthday, he was awarded a retirement pension at the reduced rate of 69 per cent. An adjudication officer decided that he was not entitled to a full retirement pension because of the deficiency in his contributions, which was at that time thought to have been between July 1948 and December 1968. Mr. Vincent challenged that, and on 23 March 1994, asked the Secretary of State to make a formal determination under section 17 of the 1992 Act. He asked whether he might pay contributions for any weeks in the period from July 1948 to 1 December 1968, and whether he satisfied the contribution conditions for a basic retirement pension.

Before a decision is given, there is a full investigation. The applicant is advised of the facts that the Secretary of State is minded to take into account, and the legislation is set out. The Secretary of State has discretion to extend time limits for the payment of voluntary contributions, but only when the failure to pay by the due date is because of ignorance or error on the part of the insured person and the ignorance or error is not due to any failure on the part of the person to exercise "due care and diligence". Although the wording appears in the 1979 contribution regulations, it replicates wording that has been used since 1967.

Mr. Vincent wrote to the Department in October 1974, but final action was not taken in adjudicating his case until March 1975. The later date was used to calculate the date from which he could pay the arrears. That was wrong; it was an error because the date of application is the relevant date. He was therefore invited to pay contributions for an extra 12 months, which he did and which increased his entitlement to 71 per cent. of the standard rate. As my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk has said, in September 1994, the question raised by Mr. Vincent was determined: he could pay, and had paid, contributions between 4 December 1967 to 1 December 1968.

A person who is aggrieved by a decision made by the Secretary of State may ask for a statement of grounds, and Mr. Vincent did so. The decision made by the Secretary of State can be reviewed if new facts are brought to his attention or he is satisfied that the decision was given in ignorance of the facts. Mr. Vincent applied for a review and provided additional information, but there were no

facts relevant to the issue of due diligence. He did not provide any further grounds to allow the decision to be reviewed.

My hon. Friend made the point about the amount of publicity about the new scheme. When the national insurance scheme was implemented in 1948, very great efforts were made to ensure that individuals who lived abroad were aware of it. A leaflet was published and sent to all the consulates, the BBC was involved through its overseas service in publicising a statement of the then Minister calling attention to the benefits of the scheme and inviting people to write to the Ministry for information, and advertisements were placed in all the major newspapers that were circulated abroad. It has of course been accepted that some people abroad remained in ignorance of the scheme. Mr. Vincent has said that he was unaware of it, and that is accepted.

Mr. Vincent believed that he was prevented from exercising due care and diligence because of the nature of his employment and his family circumstances, but the view taken by the Secretary of State was that due care and diligence had not been exercised between 1948 and 1974. It is the responsibility of the individual to maintain his records. Although the Department tries to make information very widely available, it is not under an obligation to make an individual aware of the legislation. There is no evidence to suggest that Mr. Vincent made any attempt to approach either the then Ministry or the Department, either in person while he was visiting this country or by letter to seek advice before 1974, although he had ample opportunity to do so. Legal remedies were available to Mr. Vincent which were not exercised.

I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Norfolk may feel that the circumstances are very unfortunate—some tragedy has tinged Mr. Vincent's life—but I do not have the discretion to override, interfere with, or circumvent a valid determination of the case. Mr. Vincent has not suggested that the Secretary of State has exercised his discretion unreasonably or in bad faith, and there is no new—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapse, without Question put. Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Job Insecurity

1. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent assessment she has made of the impact on employees of job insecurity. [16052]

12. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the extent of job insecurity in Britain. [16064]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): A healthy and efficient labour market minimises job insecurity. In the United Kingdom, over the past four years, nearly 900,000 jobs have been created and unemployment has fallen by more than 1 million.

Mr. Grocott: I thank the Secretary of State for her Department's courtesy in advising me that my question was linked with Question 12. I was startled to receive that information in a letter from the parliamentary business section signed by one John Major. I knew that there was job insecurity among Tory Members, but I had not realised that it had reached such crisis levels.

Has the Secretary of State seen the International Survey Research survey that shows that, whereas 10 years ago three quarters of people in work felt that their jobs were secure, the figure is now less than half, at 43 per cent.? Has she further seen the evidence in the *British Medical Journal* showing—as anyone with common sense could have guessed—that people whose jobs are threatened by privatisation or reorganisation are more likely to report symptoms of ill health than those in secure jobs?

Can I say to the Secretary of State—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."]—and to the many hon. Members behind her, who will not be with us for much longer, that problems of job insecurity are among the key reasons why people in Britain have no feel-good factor?

Mrs. Shephard: A number of people rejoice in the name John Major, including an official in my Department; all of them have great cause to feel perfectly secure in their jobs.

I am aware of the survey that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, but the majority of employees in this country have been in the same job for five years or more, and the average is eight years. The biggest cause of job insecurity is unemployment. Opposition Members do themselves no credit, and the unemployed no service, by ignoring what the rest of Europe knows: that because of British enterprise and the economic policies pursued by the Government we have in the past four years created more jobs here than France, Italy, Spain and Germany have, put together.

Mr. Burden: Surely the Secretary of State knows that, since 1992, in the west midlands, there has been a 50 per cent. increase in the number of people in temporary jobs. Is she aware that the figures show that people coming off the dole today stand a 50 per cent. or greater chance of being on it again within 12 months? Does she agree that, against that background, only a fool would describe job insecurity as a state of mind or a myth, that people are sick and tired of the Government's complacency on job insecurity, and that that is the message that will be given by the people of Wirral, South tomorrow?

Mrs. Shephard: I am disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's question. He might have been gracious enough to refer to the fact that unemployment in his constituency has fallen by 17 per cent. in a year, thanks to the Government's policies. He should admit that the policies that he and his party espouse—the national minimum wage and the European social model of employment—would threaten this country with levels of unemployment like those in Germany, at 4.3 million, and in France, at 3.1 million.

Mr. David Nicholson: Is it not the case that studies have shown that claims that job insecurity is considerable and increasing are false? Is it not the case that Britain has the lowest proportion of people in temporary work of any country in Europe? Is it not a betrayal of the success of industry, commerce and the Employment Service to claim that the statistics are fudged? The facts show that they are not, and that this country is doing better than any country in Europe.

Mrs. Shephard: Yes. The facts show that, among the major European economies, the United Kingdom has the lowest proportion of its employees in temporary work. It is sad that Opposition Members cannot welcome the fact that the United Kingdom has a higher proportion of people in work, and a lower proportion out of work, than any other major country in Europe. That is good news.

Mr. Garnier: Is my right hon. Friend aware that unemployment in my constituency has recently fallen yet again, and now stands at just over 1,350—a 50 per cent. reduction since 1992? Is she also aware that every reliable survey in the east midlands demonstrates that business confidence has never been better, that order books are getting longer and thicker, and that what my constituents fear most is people such as the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott)—who was insufferably cocky a few moments ago—forming a Government?

Mrs. Shephard: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for the success story from his constituency. I agree that it is time for Opposition Members to congratulate British business and British workers on the fact that unemployment fell again this month, in all regions, for men and women.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Secretary of State agree that we must all accept that the rapid changes in industry and commerce mean that we can no longer expect the lifelong employment that past generations enjoyed? Does she also agree that those entering employment, especially those leaving schools and universities, should be advised to expect three, four or more career changes during their working lives, and that the best way to avoid job insecurity is to gain qualifications and continue to upgrade personal skills?

Mrs. Shephard: All major economies are facing rapid changes in their labour market. Young people are well

aware of that, and they understand the necessity of leaving school, college and university equipped and trained to cope with those changes. True job security can be created only by fostering the conditions that encourage and allow employers to create jobs. We have attracted a third of all European inward investment because the Government's successful economic policies have been designed to do just that.

Mr. Congdon: Is my right hon. Friend aware that recent reports show that, despite perceptions to the contrary, the average length of time that people spend in jobs is similar to what it was a decade ago? Does she agree that the biggest danger to job security would be the implementation of the minimum wage and the social chapter, which would destroy jobs?

Mrs. Shephard: Yes. The majority of employees have been in the same job for five years or more, and the average length of time spent in a job is eight years. The policies espoused by the Opposition—the minimum wage and the European social model—would strike at the heart of the job security that we have.

Mr. Byers: In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), the Secretary of State said that the greatest cause of job insecurity was unemployment. Can she confirm that some 10.25 million people—one in four of the population of working age—have experienced at least one spell of unemployment since the general election? Is she aware that some 14,000 of those were registered through Bebington jobcentre, which covers the constituency of Wirral, South? In the light of those figures, does she agree that that provides 14,000 extra reasons why the voters of Wirral, South will tomorrow reject the Conservative party and ensure job insecurity for Tory Members?

Mrs. Shephard: Well, well, here is one I prepared earlier. Eight million people change jobs every year. I am delighted that the people of Wirral, South have enjoyed the same drop in unemployment and increase in jobs as people in every other part of the country.

Assisted Places Scheme

2. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on her plans to expand the assisted places scheme.[16053]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): This morning, I announced further assisted place allocations to more than 200 independent schools, details of which have been placed in the Library. The 10,900 entry places that we are providing from this September will help double the opportunities for children through this excellent scheme.

Mr. Hawkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will she confirm that excellent independent schools such as Arnold school have achieved consistently good results? I thank her for the announcement that 25 extra assisted places have been made available at that school. Will she confirm that there will be an opportunity—for which I have lobbied her and her colleagues—for assisted places at Elmslie school, another excellent independent school? Is not it sad that the Labour party, which once believed in increasing opportunities for less well-off families, now believes only in providing opportunities for its own children? Is not it a case of, "We're all right Harriet, Jack and Tony, kick away the ladder?"

Mr. Sheerman: Hypocrite!

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman is a hypocrite.

Madam Speaker: Order. I just heard the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) twice call the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) a hypocrite. I ask him to withdraw that remark.

Mr. Sheerman: If that is unparliamentary language, I withdraw it unreservedly.

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend is right. Labour believes in choice for itself but not for other parents. I am pleased to be able to tell him that Elmslie girls school is among the schools that are today being informed that their bids were successful. From September 1997, it will able to offer 20 assisted places, including five places to children aged eight to 11 and four to sixth formers.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Will the Minister confirm that to maintain an assisted place costs about twice as much as an equivalent place in the maintained sector, and that there is a huge deadweight cost in the scheme because it subsidises people who would otherwise pay for their children's private education? Will she further confirm that, by the Government's own standards, the scheme does not appeal to working-class children despite the protestations of Conservative Members? Will she conclude, as we have, that a far better and more cost-effective way to use Government expenditure would be to improve quality at key stage 1 rather than subsidising the few in independent schools?

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman must be hallucinating if he thinks that I will agree with one word of that. More than 42 per cent. of assisted pupils come from families whose income is below the threshold for a free place, and more than 80 per cent. are from families that earn less than the national average household income. Independent schools are a vital part of the school system. Rather than peddling the old line of abolishing assisted places, which are good value for money, the hon. Gentleman should tell us what is his party's attitude to independent schools. Is it true, as he wrote in the magazine *Prep School*, that the Labour party will abolish charitable status for independent schools?

Grant-maintained Schools (Cheshire)

3. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools have so far applied for grant-maintained status in Cheshire; and if she will make a statement. [16054]

Mrs. Gillan: Eleven schools in Cheshire have applied for grant-maintained status. Eight of those applications have been approved and the schools concerned are operating as grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Winterton: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. The Macclesfield constituency boasts excellent primary

and secondary schools, including five grant-maintained schools: Pott Shrigley Church of England school, Mottram St. Andrew junior school, Kettleshulme St. James junior school, Henbury county high school and Fallibroome county high school. In the House today I lunched with four pupils from Fallibroome county high school who have won a national competition. These are excellent schools, with super governors, wonderful staff and a history of success. Am I correct in assuming from what I hear from Opposition Members that they will abolish grant-maintained status and push the schools back under the responsibility of the county? That would be disastrous—the schools would lose their status, despite being highly popular schools with a super record of success.

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He is well known for championing grant-maintained schools and small village schools in particular—in fact, several of the grant-maintained schools in his constituency are highly successful small village schools. I hope that he will tell the story loud and clear to the thousands of parents whose children attend those excellent schools that they are safe only under a Conservative Government and that Labour would abolish the schools' status, causing disruption, chaos and grief to governors, head teachers, teachers, parents and—most of all—pupils.

Mr. Jamieson: Will the Minister confirm that, of the 491 schools in Cheshire, only one has held a ballot in the past year and that parents voted no? Is that an overwhelming endorsement of going grant maintained from the people of Cheshire?

Mrs. Gillan: The Government's grant-maintained policy is working in Cheshire. There are a number of GM schools spread across Cheshire which give parents an added element of choice and diversity. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will make it clear to the electorate in his constituency that he will abolish grant-maintained schools in Cheshire. Parents should know, head teachers should know and governors should know. Chaos will result from the Opposition's policy.

Local Education Authority Administration Costs

4. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average proportion of local education authority budgets which is spent on central administration and services. [16055]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): For 1996–97, English LEAs collectively were planning to retain 9.5 per cent. of the potential schools budget for central administration and other services.

Sir Irvine Patnick: Is my hon. Friend aware that Sheffield keeps a largish chunk of its funding for central services? I see in the Chamber two former leaders of Sheffield city council. Is not the situation in Sheffield one of the worst in the country? Head teachers are sick and tired of Sheffield keeping back funding for their schools. Two years ago—I am aware that, in Labour politics, two years is a long time—the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that 90 per cent. of the funding should go to schools. Is it not time that Sheffield started practising what the hon. Gentleman preaches?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend puts his question well. I can confirm that, in the current year, Sheffield lies 114th out of 119 local education authorities, having delegated 87.4 per cent. of its budget. Only five authorities are worse. However, I have good news for my hon. Friend: one of the early pieces of legislation in our fifth term in government will be an education Bill to enact last summer's White Paper, whereby we shall require authorities to delegate 95 per cent. of their budget. That will be good news for head teachers in my hon. Friend's constituency because, on this year's figures, it would mean another £11 million going into schools.

Mr. Turner: Is the Minister aware that, in Wolverhampton—my local authority—we are delegating 93 per cent. of the budget to schools and retaining 7 per cent. for central administration but, after several years of cuts, we find that, once again, this year, the Minister has slashed our standard spending assessment, and now we find that our revenue support grant settlement is the worst of the 36 metropolitan districts in England?

Mr. Squire: I can confirm that Wolverhampton delegates a significant percentage of its budget to schools—slightly below the 93 per cent. mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. On the substance of the question as it developed, I remind the hon. Gentleman that, for the forthcoming year, SSAs—education support—increased nationally by 3.6 per cent. on average. That average will be affected across every local education authority in accordance with any increase or reduction in the number of pupils. The question that parents and teachers in Wolverhampton must be asking is how, year after year, Wolverhampton is proposing cuts in services while we, at the centre, are proposing further increases in support.

Mr. Pawsey: I was dismayed by the implications of the exchange between my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) and the Minister. It seems that substantial funds are being diverted from the classroom and the teacher to the bureaucrats in council offices. That must be to the substantial disadvantage of the children of Sheffield. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is now time to re-examine the role-of-local education authorities? We should undertake a root-and-branch examination of their powers and responsibilities. It is time that we looked hard to see what they do and the costs that are incurred.

Mr. Squire: I can confirm that, in the current year, the range of budget delegated, on precisely the same definition, ranges from 85.1 to 96.1 per cent. Hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber can see what a significant difference it would make if all authorities delegated at the average of about 90 per cent.

My hon. Friend will remember our White Paper in which we set out two or three essential tasks for local education authorities, particularly lending support to schools that may be failing or which are seriously weak. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is important that,

year by year, local authorities look to see what more they can delegate to schools rather than waiting for legislation to force them to do so.

Mr. Don Foster: When local education authorities delegate funds to individual schools, does the Minister believe that any part of that money should be used to support the Conservative party? Is the Minister aware that, at the beginning of this month, the Huntingdon Conservative constituency association wrote letters to all the schools in the Prime Minister's constituency urging them to contribute to the Conservative party's fighting fund? What advice would the Minister give those schools on how to respond to the letter?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Positively.

Mr. Squire: I am not sure that I can improve on the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). Leaving aside the fact that the schools in question must benefit from the nature of the right hon. Member who represents them, I suppose the response that many of them might make is the same as I make when I get unsolicited mail from the Liberal Democrats.

School Discipline

5. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she is taking to enforce discipline in schools. [16057]

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): The current Education Bill, now in another place, includes a package of measures to strengthen schools' ability to take action in the face of poor behaviour and discipline, to help ensure there is proper support for schools in dealing with pupils with behavioural problems, and to promote effective provision for such pupils out of school where necessary.

Mr. Thompson: Bearing it in mind that good classroom discipline and structured teaching are essential to a successful education, can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government's welcome new approach to teacher training will give every new teacher rigorous instruction in classroom skills and handling techniques? Will he take this opportunity to accentuate the positive and pay tribute to those teachers who are now achieving good disciplinary standards in the classroom?

Mr. Forth: Throughout his many distinguished years of service in Parliament, my hon. Friend has a long and distinguished history of fighting to bring this matter to the attention of the Government and the House. As usual, he has accentuated two important points. First, the annual Office for Standards in Education inspection of schools and Her Majesty's chief inspector's report always emphasise that the vast majority of our schools and classrooms are orderly and disciplined places in which pupils learn and education is effectively carried out. Secondly, the Teacher Training Agency's current proposals on improving initial teacher training, which are out for consultation, emphasise the need to ensure that all newly qualified teachers have a firm grasp of classroom management techniques and the role that good discipline plays in good education.

Mr. Sheerman: Is it not important to get the relationship right in schools? I was pleased to hear the Minister congratulate the majority of teachers on being competent and having good discipline in their classes. Perhaps a better example would be set if the Government could show a little more discipline in the way in which they organise themselves.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman makes a typically ungracious contribution to the day's proceedings. I will join him in the first part of his comments and welcome the fact that there is common ground in acknowledging all that is good in education—there is much that is good. I will leave the latter part of his rather sad comments unresponded to.

Mr. Rowe: My right hon. Friend will remember that, in the inspector's report on The Ridings school, one of the comments was that, in classrooms where children were engaged in what was being taught, there were no disciplinary problems. That is clearly the beginning of discipline. Does my right hon. Friend agree that schools that make imaginative use of children in the enforcement of discipline throughout the school are making extraordinary strides towards achieving it?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Our recent experience demonstrates clearly that when a school develops a discipline policy, and when it involves the teachers, parents and staff to give them all a sense of ownership of that policy, unsurprisingly the discipline record is vastly better than it is in schools that do not follow those practices. We in the Department are disseminating those good practices and urging all schools to follow them, when they consider it appropriate to do so in their own circumstances.

Mr. Dafis: Does the Minister agree that adequate provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties is essential? Has not that been a Cinderella service in the past? Does he also agree that the too inflexible imposition of the national curriculum can create difficulties for schools that deal with children with such needs, and that primacy must be given to the therapeutic element of their education? Will the Department agree to continue discussions with the National Association for Therapeutic Education, which has considerable experience and knowledge of the matter?

Mr. Forth: I hope that the Department will always engage in dialogue with bodies of the kind the hon. Gentleman mentions, and that it will be a mutual learning process. That is an important part of what the Department does and will continue to do. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that we should expect any less of young people with emotional or behavioural difficulties or any other learning difficulty, or that we should expect them the less to meet the needs of the curriculum. I believe that there are other effective ways of dealing with the issue. We have the aspirations and objectives of the curriculum in place. What we must do and are doing—not least through the special educational

needs code of practice, for example—is to identify the needs of each pupil and ensure that we provide pupils with the support that they need in order to meet the requirements of the curriculum. That, I think, is the right way round.

Grant-maintained Schools (Bournemouth)

6. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools in Bournemouth are grant maintained. [16058]

Mrs. Gillan: One primary school, four secondary schools and one special school.

Mr. Atkinson: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the increased flexibility in funding, free of local authority controls, has enabled the six grant-maintained schools in Bournemouth, as elsewhere, to become even better schools? Is she aware that the Lib-Lab-controlled Bournemouth council, shortly to become a local education authority, is committed by resolution to the elimination of those grant-maintained schools? Can she confirm that grant-maintained schools in Bournemouth and throughout the country will remain safe only under a Conservative Government?

Mrs. Gillan: All the Bournemouth schools that conducted ballots to go grant maintained have returned yes votes, and my hon. Friend is correct to describe them as excellent schools. We heard earlier that there would be no choice under new Labour. There would be no choice under the Liberal Democrats either. Both new Labour and the Liberal Democrats would grab those schools back into local education authority control. They obviously consider the boards of governors, the head teachers and the teachers at those schools incapable of coping with the self-determining status that we have given them, and they wish to take decisions for those schools. No, grant-maintained schools are certainly not safe under the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Gunnell: I know that Hampshire plays at Bournemouth but, for the sake of confusion, I added together the number of schools in Dorset and Hampshire that have held ballots. I found that only three out of almost 1,000 schools had held ballots, and one of those had said no.

Madam Speaker: Order. That was a very good try, but we are dealing with Bournemouth. Only two Members of Parliament represent Bournemouth constituencies: we have heard from one, and the other is not present.

Class Sizes

7. **Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will estimate the number of (a) eight-year-olds, (b) nine-year-olds and (c) 10–year–olds being taught in classes of more than 30 pupils. [16059]

8. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on class sizes in primary schools. [16060]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Figures are not collected by age group, but evidence shows that the quality of teaching, rather than the size of the class, is the key factor in determining pupils' achievements.

Mr. Davies: Is the Secretary of State aware that on Monday councillors in Oldham had to slash the schools budget for the coming year by some £600,000? Is she aware that the parents whom I represent are tired of hearing the Government claim that they are giving more money to education, when schools budgets are being cut and class sizes are rising? Will she give a commitment to press for additional funding to ensure that local education authorities can reduce class sizes below 30 for all primary school children? If not, why not?

Mrs. Shephard: All local education authorities have had an increase this year which should allow them to prioritise and to reduce class sizes if they see fit.

Ms Lynne: Does the Secretary of State accept that the Government have grossly underfunded primary education, which has led to an increase in class sizes? Is she aware that the Labour-run local education authority in Rochdale is allocating less in its first year of administration than the Liberal Democrats allocated in their first year? Does she agree that only the Liberal Democrats are committed to funding primary education properly in order to pay for a reduction in class sizes?

Mrs. Shephard: It is indeed the case that the average class size in Rochdale is higher than that in many other parts of the country and I am sure that the hon. Lady will take the matter up vigorously with the Rochdale local education authority which, as she says, is Labour controlled.

Mr. Riddick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the surest way to reduce class sizes is to encourage local education authorities to spend less money on central administration and central services and to pass more funding to individual schools? For example, is she aware that Kirklees council in my area passes only £103 million to individual schools out of a total schools budget of £140 million? Will my right hon. Friend join me in urging Kirklees to do much better, because local head teachers know how best to spend school budgets?

Mrs. Shephard: It is certainly important for local education authorities to make what goes on in the classrooms a priority, which should be reflected accordingly in their funding arrangements.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Is not the main thrust of the question oddly directed? If there are to be greater resources in primary education, should they not be concentrated on classes for five, six and seven-year-olds?

If we look after those age groups properly, children of eight, nine and 10, given good teaching and proper classroom assistance, will reap the benefits.

Mrs. Shephard: Some interesting facts surround these matters. Her Majesty's chief inspector says that smaller class sizes are of benefit in the early years. He also says that the selection and application of teaching methods and forms of class organisation have a greater impact on learning than class size. An interesting example is provided by the Kingston LEA, which has the largest primary classes and the best GCSE results.

Mr. Blunkett: Will the Secretary of State confirm that there can be no greater example of diverting resources from lowering class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds, targeting literacy or ensuring that teachers are able to instil the basics than diverting further resources into the assisted places scheme and away from the classrooms into which our children go to learn the basics? Instead, the Government are prepared to divert that money to the interests of a few and away from the interests of the many.

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman's prejudices are showing. He talks about the diverting of resources, but the Sheffield LEA, with which he once had a great deal to do, is doing a marvellous job of diverting resources from schools in Sheffield to administration and bureaucracy in the town hall. Will he come clean and admit that his so-called plans to use money diverted from the assisted places scheme to reduce the sizes of early primary years classes have been condemned as unworkable by his advisers, the National Foundation for Educational Research, and the Institute of Public Finance, which has shown that the so-called savings would not amount to the sum that he claims and would yield one extra teacher for every nine schools? How would he divide up that teacher?

Marriage and Christian Values

9. **Mr. Hargreaves:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received regarding amendments to the Education Bill relating to marriage and Christian values. [16061]

Mr. Forth: We have received one such representation, in the form of a letter from my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who replied yesterday.

Mr. Hargreaves: Will my right. hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench accept that there was widespread support on the Conservative Benches for the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), and that there is rising concern among Christians, of both the Anglican and Roman Catholic faiths, about the position of Dr. Tate and the direction of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority? Does he further accept that we look to our right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench actively to promote and support Christian values and the model of marriage in our education policy?

Mr. Forth: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has undertaken to await SCAA's establishing beyond doubt the views of the key religious denominations in this matter to ensure that SCAA and my right hon. Friend know exactly the Churches' views when determining this very important matter. My hon. Friend may also wish to know that my right hon. Friend will shortly meet Mr. Guy Hordern, among others, to discuss these matters.

Mr. Corbett: Does the Minister recall the Prime Minister meeting people from the ethnic communities in London earlier this month and claiming that he and his party supported and embraced the multicultural and multi-faith aspects of our society? How does that square with what the Minister just told the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) about ignoring the other religions and concentrating solely on the Christian religion?

Mr. Forth: That is simply not the case. The main point at issue is the explicit role of marriage in the education curriculum and in the teaching of our young people. I am not aware—I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not implying this—that any of the main faiths, Christian or otherwise, do not give the same central core respect to marriage.

Mr. Alison: Although my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend must necessarily be reactive in responding to the SCAA national forum initiative on values in education, the Government as a whole can be thoroughly positive and proactive in supporting and promoting, not least in schools, the Christian ideal of marriage, as was vividly demonstrated by the Lord Chancellor's significant speech on 11 February during national marriage week.

Mr. Forth: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend. I remind the House that, in that excellent speech, our right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor said:

"The first thing we can all do is to promote a positive and realistic image of marriage among the public in general and especially among young people who may be contemplating marriage."

That, surely, is a typically elegant and succinct expression of the view that Conservative Members share.

My right hon. Friend expressed some reservations about the role of the forum that is advising SCAA on this. In my view, the forum that really matters in the end is the House of Commons.

Unemployment (Cumbria)

10. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals she has for new training and enterprise measures to deal with the problems of unemployment in Cumbria. [16062]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice): Unemployed people in Cumbria will have access to all the Government's new national programmes, especially national traineeships for young people and pre-vocational training for adults.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I enter a plea to the Minister that in his reply he does not merely parrot off totally spurious fiddled figures on unemployment in west

Cumbria, because my constituents simply do not believe him? Has he seen the Labour party's significant policy document called "Opportunities to Earn: Labour's proposals to tackle long term unemployment"? That document includes a raft of employment and training policies, many of which will be funded by Labour's windfall tax, which will raise billions of pounds from the former public utilities and privatised companies. It offers the first opportunity in years for many people in west Cumbria to secure employment and training.

Mr. Paice: The hon. Gentleman suggested that I had used figures in my answer, but I did not refer to any figures. I recognise that unemployment in his constituency is higher than the national average, and higher than either he or I would wish it to be. To suggest, as he does, that we could dispense with unemployment through the windfall tax is to perpetrate an immense con trick on the people in his constituency and in the rest of the country. Labour proposes to get rid of unemployment with a one-off measure from a one-off tax. Besides the cost of the windfall tax to his constituents through their pension funds and shares, we all know that that proposal could not possibly work.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Has my hon. Friend made any assessment of the job losses that would result from the lack of investment by the utilities if Labour were to implement the windfall tax? How many people in Cumbria would become unemployed because of the windfall tax before Labour even started to create the make-work schemes and spurious training schemes outlined in that stupid Labour party document?

Mr. Paice: As my hon. Friend knows, it is impossible to calculate how many people would be put out of work, because the Labour party is not prepared to say how much it would seek to raise from the windfall tax, how it would be levied and who precisely would pay it. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that it would cause a reduction in employment levels, for the simple reason that, contrary to what Labour says, there is no pot of money waiting to be taxed. If the utilities were forced to pay the tax, they would have to put up prices, cut dividends or, most likely, as my hon. Friend suggests, cut jobs.

Temporary Employment

11. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the implications of the increase in the number of temporary employees since spring 1992 for Government employment policy. [16063]

Mr. Forth: The proportion of temporary employees in the United Kingdom has risen from between 5.5 per cent. and 6.5 per cent. in 1992 to between 7 per cent. and 8 per cent., compared with a European Union average of 11.5 per cent. We shall continue with the policies that allow jobs of all kinds to be created.

Mr. Barnes: Why cannot we have a full-time Government who create full-time employment—as is proposed in the document to which my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) referred—rather than this pathetic, part-time, temporary Government, who provide only temporary, part-time work of an insecure nature? Should not the Government have some sympathy with people who are in insecure positions, as at the worst they have only nine weeks to go before they are out on their ears? We can start then to implement our policy.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his typically optimistic and happy contribution. What he did not tell the House is that if this country sought to emulate the countries on the continental mainland that he and his Front-Bench colleagues seem to admire so much—countries which have statutory minimum wages, have adopted the social chapter and do all the other things that the rather silly document to which he referred would doubtless urge us to do—one of the results might well be that we would end up with the sort of youth unemployment, and overall unemployment, that those continental countries have.

The substance of the hon. Gentleman's question concerned those in temporary employment. In this country, about 6.8 per cent. of the work force are in temporary employment, compared with 10.3 per cent. in Germany, 12.2 per cent. in France and 35 per cent. in Spain. Those are the figures that people should ponder when comparing the document cited by the hon. Gentleman with our excellent track record.

Mr. Alexander: Are not even temporary jobs better than no jobs? My right hon. Friend mentioned what might happen if we adopted the social chapter. If we did that, we would not have even temporary jobs, because the cost of taking people on would be prohibitive for employers. Surely even the Labour party does not want that.

Mr. Forth: I might go even further than my hon. Friend, although of course I agree with him. Most people in temporary work choose to be in temporary work because, for various reasons, it suits them better. All the surveys show that only a minority of temporary workers would prefer permanent jobs. As ever, Opposition Members want to force people into a straitjacket and make them accept the kind of work that the Opposition think that they should do. We, on the other hand, respect choice. People should be able to choose whether to work part time or full time, and choose between temporary and more permanent work.

Mr. Hain: The Minister is insulting the people of this country when he says that the majority choose temporary work. His own figures disprove that. Is he defending the increase of more than a third in the number of temporary workers in Britain since the last general election? Those workers are joining the many millions experiencing the job insecurity that is stalking the whole nation. Will the Minister brush up on the subject? After all, we currently have an insecure Government plagued by temporary Ministers.

Mr. Forth: We have now had the same soundbite recycled at least four times. I should have thought that Opposition Members would at least have the ingenuity to produce different soundbites rather than rely on regurgitating the same one over and over again. However, if regurgitation is to be the order of the day, I will simply repeat to the hon. Gentleman what I said a few moments ago to the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire

(Mr. Barnes), who seemed to expect us to believe that what he had said was a revelation. As I said in my reply to him, the proportion of temporary employees in this country has indeed risen from about 5.5 or 6.5 per cent. to a massive and stunning 7 or 8 per cent. of the work force, but what has the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) to say about the figures for countries on the continental mainland, which Opposition Members seek to emulate at every possible opportunity? In those countries, between 10 and 34 per cent. of the population are on temporary contracts. That is the threat that the Opposition would pose if we were ever to adopt their policies.

Employment (European Union)

13. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she next expects to meet her European Union counterparts to discuss the prospects for employment in Europe. [16065]

Mr. Paice: At the informal meeting of the European Union Social Affairs Council in March, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will again emphasise that prospects for employment in Europe will be best served by the development of efficient, flexible and competitive labour markets.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is it not instructive to compare the unemployment level here—1.8 million and falling—with that in Germany, which is 4.5 million and rising? Does my hon. Friend agree that if unemployment here increased by 500,000 in a single month—as Germany's did in January—the Opposition would be in uproar, Opposition Members on the Front Bench below the Gangway would be on their feet and the sitting would have to be suspended? Is it not extraordinary that the same Labour party supports the social chapter, the national minimum wage and all the burdens on business that have needlessly brought the misery of unemployment to many more millions in Europe—approaching 20 million at the last count?

Mr. Paice: I suspect that my hon. Friend's estimation of what might have happened if we had had those figures in this country is entirely right. I am constantly amazed that after 18 years in opposition the Labour party has not yet taken on board the fact that, however well meaning a measure may be to protect jobs or to improve people's working conditions, its effects are counter-productive. As the Labour party found in the 1970s with its Rent Acts, when we increase protection, we destroy opportunity. That is the lesson that we have learnt and which is now, sadly, being learnt throughout the rest of Europe. We are not prepared to go back to that.

Mr. Mackinlay: The Minister will be aware that the Secretary of State's attention has been drawn to a table in the Red Book which shows that the Government project that there will be a substantial increase in cyclical social security expenditure between now and 2001. Bearing it in mind that the table shows that the Government project a substantial increase in expenditure on unemployment between now and 2001, will the Minister explain why the Government have proclaimed that they are not in the business of increasing unemployment?

Mr. Skinner: That man can think on his feet.

Mr. Paice: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) says that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) can think on his feet, but the hon. Gentleman will have to think again because the conclusions that he has drawn from the Red Book are totally wrong. The Government intend to continue with the policies that have seen unemployment fall dramatically since 1992 and we anticipate unemployment continuing the downward trend that it has followed for so long.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that the real problem is that the Opposition think that Governments can create jobs? Is it not also the point that in Europe they still have the vestige of the leftovers of the idea that Governments can somehow create jobs? Producing the Labour policy document this afternoon has more to say about Labour Members wanting permanent employment on the Government Front Bench and has nothing to do with creating permanent jobs outside.

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is a message that we cannot emphasise too much. Jobs are created by successful businesses which produce goods or services that other people want to buy at a price that they can afford. Governments can create the conditions for business to prosper like that, but no Government can create the jobs that the Labour party seems to believe that they can. The Government will go on creating the conditions for business to create jobs.

Mr. Bryan Davies: Has the Minister read today's report from the Employment Policy Institute? Does he appreciate that it states that there is no evidence that the social chapter would cost jobs, and that Tory claims are overblown, inaccurate and unresearched? Is not the real issue that withdrawal from Europe, the agenda of so many Conservative Back Benchers and quite a few members of the Cabinet, would cost 3.5 million jobs?

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it absolutely clear that withdrawal from Europe is not part of the Government's approach to Europe, but on the social chapter, the people whom I prefer to listen to are the businesses that have to live with the burdens of the policies that this country could be faced with if we committed ourselves to the social chapter. I would far rather listen to German businesses that are disinvesting in Germany and coming to this country or elsewhere to escape those burdens, and to British businesses—as indeed I and other colleagues did yesterday—that are located throughout Europe and that say that they cannot expand because of the burdens of the policies caused by a social chapter approach to life. I would much rather listen to those people than to some spurious report that is clearly at odds with all the experience of businesses throughout Europe.

Mr. Mans: Will my hon. Friend give some reassurance to constituents in my part of Lancashire, and particularly to students and to people who work in the tourism industry, that the Government have no intention whatever of introducing a minimum wage, as such a device would cause havoc in the tourism industry, increase local unemployment, decrease wealth creation in the tourism industry and prevent students at local universities from taking jobs to help the economy and to help themselves through university?

Mr. Paice: I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government have no intention whatever of introducing a

minimum wage, for precisely the reasons that he describes, but also because of the implications that it would have for wage escalation. If a minimum wage at anything like the level described by the Labour party or its paymasters were introduced, everybody would seek to maintain differentials, at least to some degree. That is where huge wage and price inflation would come from, and so would unemployment: at least a million jobs would be lost.

Nursery Vouchers

14. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she estimates that every four–year–old with a voucher will have access to a pre–school place. [16066]

Mr. Robin Squire: I am confident that, over time, existing and new providers in the maintained, private and voluntary sectors will bring forward the places that parents want in exchange for nursery education vouchers.

Mr. Cunningham: When will the Secretary of State honour the Prime Minister's pledge to the Tory party conference in 1994 when he said that he would give a cast iron guarantee that all four-year-olds would get pre-school places? Is the Minister aware that the pilot schemes show that when the voucher system is used, the shortfall in the maintained sector will not be made up for four-year-olds?

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman did not complete the quotation. The Prime Minister spoke about ensuring that all four-year-olds will have a nursery place, and we have made a start during this Parliament. It is a question not of theory, but of what is happening. If the hon. Gentleman looks at what is happening under phase 1, he will see that extra places have been created not just in the local education authority sector but in the voluntary sector. *[Interruption.]* There is a net increase in the voluntary sector in Norfolk alone of more than 300 places. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition do not like the answer. Not only is there an increased number of places, but more than 1,000 four-year-olds in Norfolk are enjoying longer sessions—five sessions a week instead of three as a result of vouchers. There is a choice. The Government have given parents of all four-year-olds a greater opportunity for nursery education through vouchers. Labour would take that away from them.

Mr. Lidington: Does my hon. Friend agree that the expansion of pre-school education, which we want to see, would be most likely to take place if, building on the encouraging experience of the pilot authorities, there continue to be a constructive partnership between the maintained and the voluntary sectors in providing additional places?

Mr. Squire: Not only is my hon. Friend right in emphasising partnership, but the voucher makes that partnership more profitable for all providers. In particular, I urge any local authority or school which feels that by pressuring parents, especially those of young four-year-olds, to take those children to reception classes earlier than would otherwise be in their interests is somehow doing them a favour, to think again and work in partnership as my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Spearing: Would not the Minister make a distinction between a pre-school place and a pre-school place in a nursery school? What have the Government done since the Prime Minister's announcement about three years ago to increase the number of places and expenditure for the training of qualified nursery teachers? What figures does the Minister have on that?

Mr. Squire: The first part of the hon. Gentleman's question is about an area that he knows well. There is a range of provision which, separately, the Audit Commission and Her Majesty's chief inspector have praised over the full range, showing that each type of provider can offer good-quality pre-school provision. As for the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, it is of course a responsibility of local education authorities, and has been for some time, to ensure that teachers are given continuous training, whether in the nursery or the post-five sector. One of the other advantages of the voucher is that significant extra sums are being realised to enable more similar training to take place in the voluntary sector than has been possible in the past.

Selective Secondary Schools (Kent)

15. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to visit schools in the county of Kent in order to discuss the future of selective secondary provision. [16067]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans, but I shall be making one of my regular school visits tomorrow, when I will visit three schools in Kent, including Chatham boys' grammar school.

Mr. Dunn: When my hon. Friend the Minister is visiting schools in Kent, will he take the opportunity to remind them that Kent's selective system is guaranteed only so long as there is a Conservative Government, or a Conservative-controlled county council based at Maidstone? The current Labour-controlled county council would close our grammar schools tomorrow because, in its orthodoxy, it owes more to Joe Stalin than to the cosmetic changes patched on to the Labour party in recent years.

Mr. Squire: Of all the somersaults on education policy that we have had visited upon us by the Labour party in recent years, none is less credible than its statement that grammar schools are somehow safe in its hands. Throughout the years that I have been a Member of Parliament, and before, leaders of Labour-controlled councils and chairmen of education across the country have assured us that grammar schools will go if and when there is a Labour Government. Labour's current position is almost as if a crocodile came up to you, Madam Speaker, and said that it was now a vegetarian. You might believe that there is a faint theoretical possibility that it is telling the truth, but you would not shake its hand, and you would not turn your back on it.

Madam Speaker: On that note, we come to the end of Question Time. Thank you.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I know that you, Madam Speaker, are against parliamentary sleight of hand in any form in which it might appear. There is a widespread rumour that, at 9.30 on Friday morning, the Government will slip in what is commonly called the conspiracy Bill, which is a very controversial measure—*[Interruption.]* Well, it is a matter of freedoms, and of rather essential liberties. Whatever view one takes on the Bill, it is a matter of some consequence that it should be put in—I think, Madam Speaker, that you are taking some advice. You may be able to cast some light on the matter.

Madam Speaker: I do not deal in rumours. However, if I remember correctly, Friday's business will be not Government business but a private Members' day. Nevertheless, I shall keep my eyes and ears open.

BILL PRESENTED

DARTFORD–THURROCK CROSSING (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay presented a Bill to amend the Dartford–Thurrock Crossing Act 1988 in respect of the tolls levied on vehicles using the crossing: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 119].

National Lottery (Regionalisation)

3.32 pm

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide that equitable regard shall be had to the interests and needs of the regions of England in so far as the distribution of monies, decision taking, administration and other matters affecting the National Lottery are concerned.

The national lottery is the largest single lottery in the world, attracting 13 million regular players and producing average weekly ticket sales of nearly £70 million. According to the latest figures from the national lottery's web site, since the lottery was launched in November 1994, ticket sales have totalled over £8 billion, and more than £3 billion has been awarded to almost 19,000 successful applicants.

The national lottery has already made a substantial impact on Britain's public life. Notwithstanding legitimate concerns about gambling, it clearly has the potential to make a long-lasting contribution to improving the quality of our lives through the substantial sums it raises for good causes. It has virtually doubled public spending on sport, art, heritage and culture. Charities in the voluntary sector have also benefited—although, for well-publicised reasons, the impact on them has been more mixed.

It is essential that all that money raised for good causes is redistributed fairly. However, clear evidence shows that our regions are losing, and there is widespread concern that the different distributing bodies are too centralised, are poorly co-ordinated and have little sense of strategic purpose. The Bill is designed to address those failings. I am pleased that it has secured cross-party support, and support from hon. Members from almost all the English regions.

Lottery income is the people's money. People in the west midlands feel badly short-changed by some of the decisions of the distributing bodies, particularly the Millennium Commission, the national heritage memorial fund and the Arts Council. Losing to Greenwich for the right to stage the millennium festival still rankles with many in the west midlands, as does losing to Wembley for the new national football stadium. Recently, to add insult to injury, the bid of Birmingham Botanical Gardens and Glasshouses to create a millennium plantatarium has been turned down, and a highly imaginative animal conservation and regeneration project from Dudley zoo development trust has been rejected.

The strong feeling in the west midlands is that we have a lottery with a corrupt croupier. That feeling is backed by hard facts. In the recent third round allocation of millennium funding, according to the commission's figures, the west midlands has £14.2 million and Greater London has £88 million-worth of projects proceeding for detailed analysis. In the reserve list, Greater London has £72 million and the west midlands only £1.9 million.

The situation with the national heritage memorial fund is similarly unfair. The lottery's figures show that, up to the end of last year, the west midlands had received £1.50 per head—the lowest figure for any region, and a paltry sum compared with London's £21.70 per head. Every region has lost out to the capital, with 45 per cent. of heritage money going to London institutions or projects.

The same is true of Arts Council funding. Figures to December 1996 show that the east midlands has received just £3.20 per head and Merseyside £3.70, compared with £46.90 for London. This is not a moan or a whine. It is not about the politics of envy—it is about fairness. Every region contributes to the national lottery, and every region should expect to benefit from it.

Last week, the London *Evening Standard* pontificated:

"The greatest peril facing the lottery today is the danger that, in the name of 'fairness', far too much of its money is being given to dubious regional projects."

Excuse me! Far too much money? Dubious projects? I do not want to be churlish, but we in the west midlands are being robbed. We want our fair share of lottery cash, and we are capable of deciding for ourselves what is a good or a bad project. We do not want matters to be decided for us by some bunch of London-based, London-biased, over-privileged, arrogant so-called experts with a myopic metropolitan mentality that does not extend beyond 0171 country. Nor do we need smug, supercilious editorials applauding a system that is so clearly rigged in favour of London.

The Bill will focus on four areas. First, I want greater fairness in the distribution of lottery proceeds. I do not think that many people object to the principle of funding projects of genuine national significance separately, but the current regional disparities are too wide. I would favour a system that top-sliced budgets for national projects but then had specific regional allocations for each distributing body, based on a formula related to needs and population, as is the case with the National Lottery Charities Board.

The Government issue formal policy and financial directions to the distributing bodies through the Secretary of State under section 26 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993. The directions encourage distributing bodies to

"achieve a reasonable spread of expenditure across the regions."

That does not go far enough. Over the past two years, these directions do not seem to have been followed. The Bill would therefore amend the Act to provide for regionalisation of the distribution of lottery proceeds.

Secondly, the lottery's decision-making structures need to be reviewed, because they are too centralised. The distributing bodies are not permitted to delegate decision making on applications—some clearly do not even want to. Some boards appoint local assessors as their local eyes and ears and receive advice from their own regional bodies. However, centralised boards cannot hope to have a proper understanding of the wider context within which those seeking funds operate. They are simply not close enough to the ground.

The Bill would not just permit delegated decision making; it would require it, by providing that decisions should be taken at a regional level. It would also consider the scope for integrated decision making through regional lottery partnership boards with business and local authority representation and ring-fenced allocations for each worthy cause.

Thirdly, while I accept entirely the merits and implications of a bid-driven system, I believe that the current way in which money is allocated is insufficiently strategic. Each distributing body has its own strategy of sorts, but there is little linkage between them, and little obvious connection with the strategies of other organisations. To maximise the impact of lottery money, a strong argument can be made for linking it to the totality of resources available for regeneration in a region, including the single regeneration budget, European funds, private finance, training and enterprise council funds, and local authority resources.

The Bill would require the regionalised lottery bodies to take account of area and regional economic development strategies when making decisions on awards, thereby ensuring that money is allocated within a coherent framework.

Fourthly, the final matter that the Bill will address is what happens when the Millennium Commission is wound up. There is a compelling case for new regionalised commission structures, specifically focused on funding regional economic development measures and initiatives. They could support a wide range of projects, and the commissions would be required to work closely with the other distributing bodies to avoid duplication.

The national lottery has been a major success story in raising money for good causes. The way in which the money has been distributed, however, has created widespread concern. There is a growing feeling that the regions are losing to London and the south-east. If there is no change in the way in which the lottery operates, it runs the risk of losing the confidence of the British public, which is so vital to its future success. Greater fairness in the regional distribution of lottery cash should be a priority, and I therefore seek leave to bring in my Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Ian Pearson, Mr. Richard Alexander, Mr. David Clelland, Mr. Jim Cunningham, Mr. Harold Elletson, Mr. Nick Harvey, Mr. John Heppell, Sir Robert Hicks, Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mr. Paddy Tipping and Mr. Nicholas Winterton.

National Lottery (Regionalisation)

Mr. Ian Pearson accordingly presented a Bill to provide that equitable regard shall be had to the interests and needs of the regions of England in so far as the distribution of monies, decision taking, administration and other matters affecting the National Lottery are concerned: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 120].

Points of Order

3.42 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. No doubt you will be fully aware of the statement by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces about events in the Gulf, how individuals suffering from Gulf war syndrome may have been affected, and how information may well have been withheld from him when he came to the House to make that statement.

As the House's only proper avenue has always been through Ministers who hold responsibility, and as there is a possibility that an individual may have deliberately withheld information from such a Minister, will you guide me and the House as to whether it would be possible for individuals in that Department, if they subsequently were proved to have deliberately withheld information, to be called to the Bar of the House to explain why they deliberately withheld information from the House—which would be an abuse of the House, as our only way of obtaining information is through the Minister? If they have done so, surely they have abused the privileges of the House.

Madam Speaker: To adopt such a procedure, the matter would first have to be accepted by the House, then go to the Privileges Committee and come back before we could take such action.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. We know that you are ever vigilant, and that there is no time when your ears and eyes are not fully open, but I may not have explained that the Bill to which I referred earlier is technically a private Member's Bill, in the name of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). It is of such importance, however, that, had it been implemented in the past, Nelson Mandela, for example, would not have been able to come to Britain—to say nothing of such people as Karl Marx and others. In such circumstances, could you possibly offer guidance on what techniques are available for slipping in private Members' Bills at the very last moment, on highly important and controversial subjects, on a Friday morning?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I was one of those present the other Friday when, fortunately, myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) forced a vote on the Third Reading of the Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill. The supporters of the so-called private Member's Bill, which is a Government Bill that has been taken off the shelf and handed over to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), were defeated on a technicality because they got only 26 votes. The result of such a defeat is that any private Member's Bill, from wherever it comes, must go to the back of the queue. It was not given a Third Reading.

I would find it astonishing if what is technically a private Member's Bill that had lost its place in the queue suddenly found itself at the head of the queue, to the disadvantage of other private Members' Bills that are due to be debated on Friday. That would not only break many precedents, but would be very shabby practice on the part of a Government who were trying to protect what in practice is their own Bill, even though, in theory, its promoter is one of the Tory Back Benchers. I hope, Madam Speaker, that you will look very closely at this issue, and ensure that the Bill in question takes its proper place in the queue and other Bills remain undisturbed.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is absolutely right. It is my understanding of the procedures of the House that private Members' Bills have to take a strict order. If the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), has heard by rumour that something is about to happen, would it be appropriate and of great help to you and the House if he said where he heard that rumour? Rumour—we know what it is; you know what it is. Can you help us?

Madam Speaker: As I said in my answer to the original point of order, I cannot deal in rumour. If hon. Members would only tell me where the rumour came from, I could probably investigate rather more.

The Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill to which the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) referred—he did not make it clear in his point of order to which Bill he was referring, and I was therefore not too sure about it—is of course, as he says, a private Member's Bill. I was in the Chair a week last Friday when the debate on it began, and I watched very carefully what happened to the Bill. It is among the remaining orders, it has been debated in the House, all procedures are being correctly followed, and it will be before us on Friday. I assure the House that no precedent is being broken. The Bill is being dealt with normally.

If Members want to deal with the Bill as they think fit, they should be here on Friday to do so. I remember distinctly that there were only two hon. Members in the House who were opposed to the Bill when I was in the Chair a couple of Fridays ago.

European Communities (Economic Information)

3.47 pm

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): I beg to move,

That this House takes note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98 for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.

The motion seeks parliamentary approval of the Government's assessment of Britain's economic and budgetary position in order to allow treaty obligations to be fulfilled in relation to the excessive deficits procedure and the broad economic guidelines. The assessment is contained in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report"—the Red Book—parts of which are relayed to the European Commission. The "Financial Statement and Budget Report" describes the Government's tax and spending plans and explains how they are related to their economic and political objectives. The front cover of the Red Book states that it forms the basis of submissions to the European Commission for the purposes of multilateral surveillance of economic policies.

In sending the information, the Government are continuing to co-operate with the long-standing practice of sharing information on economic matters with our partners in the Community. Most of that information is already in the public domain.

Approval today would allow the Government to participate in this year's surveillance exercises in the same way as in previous years. There is no question whatever of information submitted being used to make policy recommendations with any binding effect on the United Kingdom.

Surveillance by the Commission is nothing new. Formal surveillance at Community level has been in place for more than 20 years, and we have also signed up to the independent examination of our economic performance by international bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Monetary Fund and G7.

Participating in such surveillance exercises has enabled independent international bodies to proclaim the United Kingdom's economic record to a wide audience, helping to promote the Government's economic policies. For example, the Commission's recently published annual economic report noted that unemployment in the United Kingdom is much lower than the European Union average, and that our strong performance can be attributed directly to the Government's deregulatory labour market measures.

The Commission also noted that the UK recovery has been of a longer duration than that of the rest of the EU, and that it has been sustainable, with inflationary pressures subdued. The Commission cited the Government's policies as the cause of that favourable outturn, in particular applauding the UK's macro-economic policy framework and supply-side reforms.

The Commission noted that the Government's prudent monetary policies are expected to keep inflation within its desired range, and that the Government should reach their target of 2½ per cent. for underlying inflation. I should add that those are all the very words used by the Commission.

The House may also note that inflation has been below 4 per cent. for more than four years, the longest time for more than half a century; that public finances are under tight control, allowing tax to be cut in the past two Budgets, with Government borrowing on a clear downward trend; and that interest rates remain at historically low levels.

However, the debate is primarily about transmitting information to the European Commission to comply with our treaty obligations, and I hope that the House will support the motion.

3.50 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): What does all this mean, and does it matter, especially if the Government are hostile in any event to a single currency?

Last week, the Foreign Secretary appeared to tell us on the "Today" programme that he was hostile to a single currency. Then we heard from one of our national newspapers that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) had contacted Conservative party central office to ask whether he could call that a significant change of policy, and got official blessing.

At about 11 am, the Chancellor said that the Foreign Secretary had made a slip of the tongue, and that there was no change of policy. By lunchtime, the Foreign Secretary had said that it was not a slip of the tongue; therefore, presumably it was a change of policy. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister had issued a statement saying that there had been no change of policy. Nobody seemed to know what the policy was.

The Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary were clearly at odds. The Prime Minister tried to settle that adult Punch and Judy show by organising a meeting between the two that evening. I understand that the two combatants met at about 10.30 pm and issued a press release at about 2 am the following morning, saying that the Government were hostile only to a fudged single currency. They may say that, but does anyone seriously believe it?

The following day, the former Chancellor, Lord Howe, said on the "Today" programme:

"Yesterday's spat didn't do any good for the Conservative Party or the country . . . many people will feel reluctant to give continuing support to that Government."

The *Daily Mail* leader simply said, "What a pantomime". It was indeed a bizarre performance. The Government are confused and at times confusing; they are at odds over Europe, and it appears that certain Ministers are positioning themselves not for the general election but for the leadership election that is to follow.

Confusion over Europe has been replicated on economic policy. This is, after all, the Government who sent Britain spinning ignominiously out of the exchange rate mechanism, and the Prime Minister is the former Chancellor who recommended that we joined the ERM at an exchange rate that became unsustainable. That is history.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): As the hon. Gentleman has touched on the moment when we left the exchange rate mechanism, will he clarify on the record exactly what his colleagues' position was at that time? Did they want us to stay in the ERM or to leave; to hike interest rates or to lower them? It is important to get that on the record.

Mr. O'Brien: As I have just said, that is history. Our view was that, if we were going to enter the ERM,

[Mr. O'Brien]

we should do so at a sustainable level, for the right reasons and at the right time. The then Chancellor, who is now the Prime Minister, decided to enter for the wrong reasons, at the wrong time and at the wrong exchange level. He decided to enter because, as everybody knows, he had managed to convince the then Prime Minister, who was on her uppers, to accept entry.

That was the political reasoning behind the economic judgment. The decision was made not in Britain's economic interest, but through concern about the future of the Conservative party. That is how economic policy and European policy have been approached in the past decade.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose—*

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge–Brownhills) *rose—*

Mr. O'Brien: I know that many hon. Members want to speak, so I will give way once more to the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd).

Mr. Shepherd: Does the hon. Gentleman not recall that the entire leadership of the Labour party at that time, including the late lamented John Smith, passionately believed in membership of the exchange rate mechanism? At the time of the difficulties caused by the rate, the Labour party passionately espoused our continued membership, and argued that interest rates would go up if we left. That time should be remembered in that context. Members of the Labour party are the greatest arguers now for entry into a form of ERM that would be set in concrete—monetary union.

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman should remember that the leadership of his party said that sustaining membership of the ERM at the rate in question was the basis of its whole economic strategy, and it failed. The economic strategy on which the Tories went to the country in 1992 failed a few months later. It failed in many ways. Yesterday, the Library published an interesting and amusing snapshot analysis that showed that Britain would not hit the criteria for monetary union. It suggested that only Luxembourg and Ireland are on course for a single currency. Some single currency.

The Government have made great claims for their economic performance in their attempts to meet the Maastricht criteria. The reality is different. On inflation, last year we were 11th out of 15 in Europe: we were in the bottom half, and below the European average. On gross domestic product per person, we were ninth in Europe. On growth, between 1979 and 1995, we were 13th in Europe. On industrial production, in the same period, we were 12th out of 14 countries. On investment, we were at the bottom. Indeed, for the first 14 years of Tory government, we were at the bottom of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's league of 25 countries. On interest rates, we were 11th. On unemployment, we were eighth out of 11.

The Prime Minister promised to make Britain the enterprise centre of Europe. Like his promises on tax, that promise has been broken. A recent report by economists Ray Barrell and Nigel Pain shows that foreign investment in France, between 1991 and 1995—the period that the Government like to look at—was $19 billion, or £12 billion, compared with Britain's $17 billion. At the same time, British firms invested $25.4 billion in Europe and abroad, making Britain a net outward investor. France, with the social chapter and an increased minimum wage, was more attractive than Tory Britain to many foreign investors.

The divisions in the Conservative party mean that it is incapable of advancing Britain's national economic interest. The Tories have failed on the economy, and have failed to get the best deal in Europe. The civil war in the Tory party means that it has put at risk the 3.5 million jobs and the huge investment that depend on our membership of Europe.

The re-election of the Conservatives would bring an influx of more Euro-sceptic Members to continue the civil war over Europe, and the victim would be British interests in Europe. Some Tories have gone dangerously far. For many of today's Euro-sceptics, being pro-British seems to mean being anti-European. They seem to think that, if someone is pro-European, he is un-British. Their rhetoric continually assails EU institutions as some sort of doomed failure. How can we make Britain successful in Europe when the Conservative Government continually undermine our involvement?

Euro-sceptics in the Conservative party seem to be of two sorts: those who plain do not like Europeans and want Britain to be detached and isolated; and those who regard the European Union as a free trade area, want no further integration, and want Britain to move from being a close participant to being a loose associate. Both aspirations are unrealistic.

In the modern world, nations are more interdependent than independent. Trade between nations is increasing at double the rate of growth among nations. The idea that Europe's future lies in a loose free trade area was the illusion of the 1950s. We had to admit that it did not work, and we traded in membership of the European Free Trade Association for membership of the Common Market.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: I shall not, because many hon. Members wish to speak. I have already given way twice. It would be better if hon. Members sought to catch the Chair's eye in due course.

We traded in EFTA membership for the Common Market because EFTA alone was not working. Today, the European single market goes beyond a free trade area. It includes policies for social cohesion that make it acceptable. It has a co-ordinated external policy that gives us clout in world trade negotiations. It gives us a common competition policy and standards of safety that benefit working people. Moving from full participant to loose associate would deter inward investment, prejudice our position in financial services and harm the City of London.

Many in the Conservative party are seeking to repeat Labour's mistakes of 1983. Then it was suggested by the Confederation of British Industry that Labour's policy of disengagement would put 2.5 million jobs at risk. That was when 44 per cent. of our exports went to our

European neighbours. Our trade and jobs links to the EU have increased: more than half our trade and 3.5 million jobs would be put at risk by the policy of a Euro-sceptic Conservative Government.

I am sure that the Chancellor of the Exchequer shares our view that the Euro-sceptics in the Conservative party are job destroyers, who would put at risk British business relationships with Europe. Continued EU membership is essential for open access to Europe's markets. Leaving would horrify our business community and create new obstacles to European markets. It would cause job losses and shrinkage of inward investment. Being pro-British does not require us to be anti-European, but it can require us to lead in Europe for Britain.

The prosperity of Britain depends on the skill of its Government in making a success of our membership. We export more goods to Germany than to the United States or Japan; more to Holland than to all the new economies of the far east. Britain's membership of the largest, most prosperous market in the world gives us powerful leverage in trade negotiations with the rest of the world that we would not possess in isolation.

We can get more out of the European Union by co-operation than by confrontation. We cannot be a success in Europe if we reduce Britain to the margin of the debate and become hecklers from the sidelines. That is why the bosses of Unilever and Toyota are so concerned about the lurch to anti-Europeanism in the Tory party. Niall FitzGerald of Unilever said that continuing the current negative approach to Europe would lead to

"reconsideration of certain investment decisions. If the UK was gently floating off into the Atlantic, we'd have to reconsider things."

In the modern high-tech, fast-moving global economy, the Conservative world is still rooted, in many ways, in the model of independent nations that belongs to the last century rather than the next. In their hearts, many Conservatives know that; certainly the Chancellor of the Exchequer knows it. I thought that the Prime Minister knew it. Before the Euro-sceptics put an armlock on him, he began this Parliament by saying that it was wrong for Britain to stand on the outskirts of Europe as an island tossing bricks into it. Today, he is finishing the Parliament trying to prove that he is better at tossing bricks than the hon. Members for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) or for Stafford (Mr. Cash).

Our relations with our European neighbours are in crisis because there is a crisis of leadership in the British Government. The Prime Minister and Cabinet repeatedly give priority to pandering to the prejudices of their party rather than to serving the interests of British business or the British people. That is why both the people and business are realising that they would rather trust the judgment of a Labour Government, based on a hard-headed assessment of economic reality, than risk being taken by the Conservatives down a path dominated by hysteria and prejudice. So concerned are they that they see the internal civil war in the Conservative party becoming much worse if the Government are re-elected to a fifth term.

Increasingly, and despite the Chancellor, the Tory party is the anti-European party. If anyone had said in 1972 of the Conservative party which took us into Europe that, in 1996, senior Tories would be seriously contemplating leaving Europe, few would have believed it. Labour's view is clear. We cannot afford to hover half in and half out, heckling from the sidelines and sending out search parties to find issues on which to attack Europe, purely for domestic propaganda; failing to take participation seriously and leaving empty chairs at negotiations on social legislation.

Mr. Marlow: Shall we just take our orders from Brussels?

Mr. O'Brien: I tell the hon. Gentleman that Labour opposes a unitary, federalist or centralised European state—a sort of united states of Europe. We seek co-operation between member states, based on a common enterprise. We believe that subsidiarity can decentralise power. We do not believe that the European Union presents any threat to our culture, our institutions, our language or our character.

Labour believes that the Maastricht treaty should remain a treaty between independent nations that pools sovereignty by agreement, rather than represent the consolidation of some sort of European super-state. We want an inclusive union. We prefer greater subsidiarity to the large-scale extension of the competence of any of the European Union institutions.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: I have said that I will not give way, for the reasons that I have stated.

There is no danger of a European super-state—the different cultures and national histories in Europe are too strong. I agree with the Prime Minister's assertion that to see the single currency as a step towards federalism is "unrealistic". The dire warnings of some Euro-sceptics are often hyperbole bordering on the absurd. There is and ought to be a debate about the nature of Europe, whether there should be a single currency and the relationship between the nation states and the Union; but the terms of that debate as reported in our national media have so far produced more heat than light.

The fact is that Labour's position on the single currency is almost entirely the same as that of the Chancellor—I cannot say that it coincides with the Cabinet's view, because members of the Cabinet seem to have several different versions of the policy. Both the Chancellor and the Labour party are pro-European, but not federalist. We are not opposed in principle to a single currency, but we understand the practical difficulties. The Chancellor and Labour disagree on the social chapter, but we are not far apart on monetary union.

Mr. Marlow: What about Ted Heath?

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman asks from a sedentary position about the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). I was delighted to hear—

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: Let me respond to the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow); then I shall give way.

I was delighted to hear the comments of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup at the weekend that he, as the last but one Conservative Prime Minister,

[Mr. O'Brien]

endorses Labour's views on the social chapter, devolution and the minimum wage. Both the Chancellor and Labour want to keep this country's options open on a single currency.

Mr. Oppenheim *rose—*

Mr. O'Brien: I wonder whether the Minister can say that he is not a Euro-sceptic, and that he agrees with his Chancellor on the Government's policy. I suspect that he will not.

Mr. Oppenheim: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, 16 minutes into his opening remarks in a one-and-a-half-hour debate. He said earlier that the Government's position on economic and monetary union was confused and confusing, and he has just stated the Labour party's policy. In the debate on this subject almost exactly a year ago, he said:

"Unlike the Government, Labour has a clear principle to guide it".

He also said:

"The position of the Labour party on European economic and monetary union is quite clear. We approve the principle of economic and monetary union".

Does he still stand by that statement?

Mr. O'Brien: The Chancellor has repeatedly said—

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Minister sit down and let me answer his question?

The Chancellor has repeatedly said that he does not oppose the single currency in principle, and I say that we have made our position clear all along. The Labour party and I take the view that we are not opposed in principle to a single currency. I understand that that is the view of the Government, and it is the view of the Labour party.

Mr. Oppenheim: I will read the words again carefully, so that the hon. Gentleman can give a straightforward answer about whether it is still the Labour party's policy and his own view. He said:

"The position of the Labour party on European economic and monetary union is quite clear. We approve the principle of economic and monetary union".—[*Official Report*, 12 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 772.]

Does the hon. Gentleman stand behind those words? Is that still Labour's policy?

Mr. O'Brien: Is it not also Government policy? Is it not the Government's policy to say that they are not opposed to a single currency in principle? The Labour party is saying clearly that we are not opposed to a single currency in principle. There are many advantages to a single currency, such as reducing transactional costs, stability in the currency in the long term, and many others.

We must also be aware of the practical difficulties. The Labour party has set out quite clearly the fact that there are some practical difficulties that we have to bear in mind. Labour has made it clear that any decision will not only involve applying the Maastricht criteria: does the Minister agree that there should also be British criteria?

Let me set out the criteria clearly. What is to be the likely impact on investment by British firms in Britain and Europe and on inward investment into Britain? What would be the effect on our financial services? Are the various European countries at different stages of the economic cycle, and what impact would that have on our economy? Is there sufficient flexibility to respond to any problem that may arise? What would be the impact upon employment? The jobs issue is crucial for Labour; is it crucial for the Government? Unfortunately, so far the European Union has talked about employment but has not done enough.

Europe cannot be well placed to be a successful union on the backs of 17 million unemployed. Our vision is not of a Europe of bureaucrats or politicians, nor just of a Europe for business—although we want business to succeed and prosper. Our vision of Europe is of a community for ordinary people. That means jobs for people.

We want workers to have rights at work, and that is why we will sign the social chapter and join our European partners in having a minimum wage. That is why we have made it clear how we will determine what is in Britain's national economic interest. We will take a hard-headed look at the economic practicalities of the single currency and how it will affect the ordinary people of Britain.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: I have said repeatedly that I am trying to make progress. The Minister has already suggested that I am taking too long.

Mr. Kennedy *rose—*

Mr. O'Brien: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but this is the last time. I am about to finish.

Mr. Kennedy: I have been listening with great interest to the hon. Gentleman, and, although I do not disagree with the general pro-European sentiments being expressed, I am less than enamoured with the manner in which they are expressed. The hon. Gentleman set out the British criteria under a putative Labour Government. Is it the Labour party's negotiating stance for the completion of the intergovernmental conference that those criteria should be part and parcel of any subsequent decision that is taken?

Mr. O'Brien: The single currency issues will be determined apart from the IGC.

Mr. Kennedy *rose—*

Mr. O'Brien: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would clarify his question, because I do not understand it.

Mr. Kennedy: Perhaps I am not making it clear. Although the single currency issue is not folded into the IGC discussions, is the hon. Gentleman saying that

the Labour party's stance would be that there could be no agreement at the IGC without those criteria being met subsequently?

Mr. O'Brien: I think that the hon. Gentleman is still, to some extent, confusing the single currency issues with the IGC.

We are setting out criteria by which we will judge whether to enter a single currency, and, if so, at what time. That is the purpose of setting out the criteria. I still do not quite follow the hon. Gentleman's question, but perhaps he will talk to me afterwards, when I can explain the difference between the IGC and the single currency.

No sensible Chancellor could close down the options, especially in an area which has over half our trade and 3.5 million jobs dependent upon it. Getting it right is more important than getting it quickly. That is why there is a triple lock on any decision. Not only the British opt-out, but the vote of the British Parliament and the referendum of the British people make up the triple lock. The decisions will be made by Labour in Britain's interests, to meet British needs, after a cool and hard-headed assessment of our national economic interests.

Within three months, the people of this country will decide on the Government to take Britain into the 21st century. The choice will determine the shape of Britain's relations with our European neighbours for a generation. The choice is whether Britain will go forward with Labour to be a leading force in shaping the future of Europe, or turn in on itself with the Conservatives to become a country at the margins, for ever left behind.

4.14 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): We have just heard the most extraordinary speech from the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien). Not only is he apparently incapable of giving a straight answer to any question, but he could not even tell the House whether he stood by his own words in the Chamber a year ago.

The British people cannot possibly be tempted to put the government of this country in the hands of politicians who conduct themselves in that way. I have never heard a less inviting prospectus for any candidate for the government of Britain than the hon. Gentleman's speech. Such indecisiveness and mealy-mouthed ambiguity are the hallmark of so many speeches that we hear from the Labour Front Bench.

It comes a bit rich from Labour Front Benchers to deliver homilies in favour of the European Union and the European single market, when we know perfectly well that had the British people elected Labour to power in the 1980s—in their wisdom, the British people did not do so—we would not have been part of the European Union. There never would have been a single market. Even the present Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), fought the 1983 election on a programme of getting out of the European Community, as it then was.

I must not use unparliamentary language, but there must be real doubts in the minds of the British people about the sincerity of a great many statements made by Labour Front Benchers. It is clear that the Labour party's new-found enthusiasm for the European Union and the single market is just part of the parcel—of a purely cynical attempt to gain power at any expense, and to change Labour's marketing strategy to embrace the whole range of Conservative policies, because those policies have so obviously worked and carry the confidence of the country.

The only way in which the Labour party can hope to form a Government again is by trying to persuade the electorate that it has adopted our policies and is capable of implementing them. That is a thoroughly implausible proposition, and the hon. Gentleman's speech today gives little confidence that the Labour party would be capable of pursuing any consistent line of policy on any subject, if ever it came to power.

The decisions of Conservative Governments at the relevant time, to enter the European Community, as it then was, in the 1970s, to establish the Single European Act, which set the framework for the single market in the 1980s, and to sign up to the Maastricht treaty in the 1990s, have been magnificently vindicated by events. Britain has gained enormously from the single market.

I have not yet seen any trade figures for the whole of 1996, but the figures for 1995 showed that our exports to the rest of the single market increased by 18 per cent. In the first year of the single market's full operation in 1993–94, our exports had risen by 11 per cent.—vastly more than our trade as a whole.

When I go round businesses in my constituency in Lincolnshire, as I do almost every Friday, I see how many small and medium-size businesses, especially in manufacturing, food processing and food wholesaling, are for the first time selling across the water, particularly in the Benelux countries and often in France and Germany. If Britain has had a fine economic record over the past several years, the single market has played a major part.

The single currency is a highly emotive issue. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to debate the subject rationally either in the House or elsewhere. I regret that, as it will be necessary for the British people to take a careful, cool and rational decision in a referendum—which is what we have promised them—on this important matter. A single currency clearly has considerable benefits for trade, business, the development of a single market and travellers. Those facts are not in dispute. However, the essence of the whole monetary union programme is that we would give up the option of devaluing in the future and commit ourselves indefinitely not to run fiscal deficits above the level of excess deficits as defined in the treaty—it may be 3 per cent. or perhaps 2 per cent. under a stability pact.

I understand that some people do not want to give up those freedoms. Others believe that it would be splendid to resist those temptations—it would be rather like an addict giving up heroin, which would be locked away permanently. We shall have that argument in the next Parliament, I hope in a cool and a detached manner. The British electorate will have to evaluate the considerable economic stakes very carefully when the time comes. It will be important to listen to the voice of business: to those who are responsible for their companies' fortunes and who take decisions about investment patterns that will determine our prosperity and employment opportunities.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): In dealing with these matters in a calm and rational manner, the hon. Gentleman achieves what most hon. Members can

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

only attempt to do. Does he agree that economic and monetary union involves two aspects: first, the principle itself; and, secondly, the convergence criteria, which he has touched upon—the 3 per cent. and the 60 per cent.? We heard yesterday about the proposed privatisation of London Underground. The Secretary of State claimed that public investment would "score", but that private investment would not. The hon. Gentleman is knowledgeable in such matters. Will he explain why Treasury money that might be invested in London Underground would count against the 3 per cent. and the 60 per cent. convergence criteria limits, but private borrowing would not? If that is so, how would precisely the same work on the same trains in the same tunnels in the same city prevent our joining EMU on the one hand, but favour our joining on the other? If my description is correct, is that rational?

Mr. Davies: If I may return the compliment, the hon. Gentleman has always played a particularly distinguished role in discussions on this subject in the House. I always enjoy debating the matter with him. I have never known him to turn up to a Committee without first doing his homework—and one cannot say that with confidence about many hon. Members. If it is possible to say that I shall regret the departure of a Labour Member of Parliament, I shall regret the fact that the hon. Gentleman will not be participating in future debates on this subject.

I refer to public and private investment—and I think that my answer will not surprise the hon. Gentleman. There is all the difference in the world between investment undertaken in the public sector and that undertaken in the private sector. Public sector investment is not necessarily undertaken according to commercial and economic criteria. The resources used for investment in the public sector are drawn compulsorily from the public through taxation—no one has any choice in the matter. In the private sector, if one wants to invest, one must persuade one's shareholders, lenders or other stakeholders to provide the money. There is a natural discipline that is absent from the public sector.

It follows that it is potentially dangerous to allow Governments to spend large amounts and to call it investment expenditure. If we allow the private sector to undertake commercial investments of the kind that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, in London transport or in any other field, we may be certain that those investments will be justified according to economic criteria. If they are not, the financial markets will not make the money available. There is a real conceptual distinction and a sensible discipline that is reflected in the way in which we have always taken public spending—whether as investment or consumption—into account in the public sector borrowing requirement. I believe that Eurostat will do the same for the purposes of calculating public expenditure under the convergence criteria.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) referred to my reference to the fiscal deficit rule as merely part of the convergence criteria. It is, of course, one of the essential convergence criteria, but the obligation permanently to maintain fiscal discipline is at the very essence of monetary union. It is necessary to underwrite the stability of monetary union. It is extremely important. We shall argue on future occasions whether it represents a net gain or a net loss to economies to give up that particular freedom.

Mr. Spearing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No. I know that the hon. Gentleman would like to catch your eye, Madam Speaker, later in the debate to pursue these important matters.

Before I leave monetary union, it is important to emphasise that although it implies constraints on Governments' borrowings, absolutely no constraint is implied at all on what Governments can spend or tax. By definition, as the deficit is limited, if Governments wish to spend, they will have to raise the current revenue to finance that spending. To some of us, that is a great gain not only for the economy, economic stability and sound finance, but for democratic accountability, because Governments will not be able to return to the habits of the 1970s, when the Labour Government made entirely irresponsible spending promises to the electorate, and delivered them not merely by increasing taxation—heaven knows they did that, and by more than enough—but by borrowing and running the public sector borrowing requirement up to more than 12 per cent. of gross domestic product. That was a scandalous level. We now hear self-righteous speeches from both sides of the House, denouncing the Italians for running an irresponsible public deficit that is half the level that the Labour party had in the 1970s.

The purpose of today's debate is to approve the Government's sending to the European Commission the analysis of the British economy contained in the Red Book. It is clearly a matter on which the hon. Member for North Warwickshire was not going to touch, because the Red Book presents the most formidably successful story of any economy in living memory in western Europe. We have had five years of constant growth. Unemployment has fallen by more than a million in the course of three years. I challenge Opposition Members to tell me of another western European country that has been able to reduce unemployment by that amount in that period.

We have been able to reduce unemployment without running into inflationary or balance of payments constraints, which always happened when a Labour Government were in power, because as soon as demand increased steadily for a year or two, the British economy could not supply the goods and services demanded, so we sucked in imports. There has been a genuine supply-side revolution in this country, and that is testified to by the extraordinary way in which the balance of payments has not gone into significant deficit, despite five years of continuous growth.

Mr. Mike O'Brien *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I shall give way briefly to the hon. Gentleman, because I referred to him.

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman is indulging in a pantheon of success for the Conservative Government, but does he accept that the level of unemployment is almost double what it was when the Conservatives came into office in 1979?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the structural level of unemployment throughout

western Europe has increased substantially over the past 20 years. I hope that we shall have the support of the Labour party in taking the measures that are likely to reduce the structural level of unemployment in this country, particularly reform of the benefits system. So far, all that we have had from the Labour party is a lot of promises that would make the position far worse and increase structural unemployment in this country, particularly by introducing the minimum wage. I cannot think of a more disastrous and ill-conceived policy, either from the humane or from the economic point of view.

I commend the report to our partners in the European Union. They will find it extremely interesting reading, and it will be one more piece of evidence likely to persuade them that the British model under Conservative Governments delivers employment, delivers prosperity, and delivers investor confidence in modern conditions better than any others currently on offer.

4.29 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): It was interesting to hear a series of soundbites about Europe from the Opposition, rather than specific answers to specific questions. We must put the Labour party right on its view that Britain is alone in having doubts about the way in which Europe is going on economic affairs. All the evidence shows that throughout the continent there is a sudden awakening of concern and alarm about what the European Union is doing to people.

I can do no better than to quote from one of the splendid papers that I am sure Labour Members read, called *The Guardian*, in which it was reported today that 77 per cent. of the people of Germany are now opposed to economic and monetary union. That is not 10 per cent., 20 per cent. or merely a handful: the great majority of the people of Germany do not want it.

I was also interested to read in that article that a gentleman called Gerhard Schröder, who is an important person—he is a state premier—is planning to challenge Mr. Kohl for the chancellorship next year on a Euro-sceptic platform. In today's *Der Spiegel*, which is an important magazine, he said:

"You have to be able to stop a train which is running in the wrong direction."

The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) shakes his head. He can have this article: that is what the bloke said, and that is the truth.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I do not want to enter into a discussion about Mr. Schröder's politics, but he is a nationalist. His speeches in Germany are profoundly nationalistic, and he alarms many people, although he is in our sister party.

Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in the early 1980s, every opinion poll showed that three out of four British people wanted to withdraw altogether from the European Community, as it then was? That was official Labour party policy in 1983. Does the hon. Gentleman recall which party won the election in 1983, when the British people, according to opinion polls, were wholly opposed to the European Community?

Sir Teddy Taylor: That is the most depressing thing I have heard in a long time, and I have been in the House for 30 years. The hon. Gentleman is saying that we should go along with what people seem to be thinking so as to win elections. It is scandalous if the hon. Gentleman has come to Parliament only to support what he thinks people are saying today. I am not making a personal attack on him: I just hope that he will wake up, think about telling the truth and give guidance on what is right.

Mr. MacShane: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Teddy Taylor: No, get lost. I am trying to make a brief speech on important issues.

We must wake up to the fact that throughout the continent of Europe, people are realising that something nasty is happening to them. The hon. Member for Rotherham may laugh, but it is not funny for the 5 million people on the continent of Europe outside the United Kingdom who have lost their jobs in the past five years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) referred to our trade success. What about the facts? The plain fact is that since we joined the EC, we have had a deficit of £100,000 million, which is a lot of money. I wish that, instead of making European slogans, people would wake up to what is happening.

I have great respect for the hon. Member for Rotherham, but I wish that people would listen to what the bunch of people who come along to these debates, in which no one is interested, have been saying for some time. We may not be terribly clever, but a small group of us—almost all of us are here now—voted against the exchange rate mechanism, because we believed that it was a recipe for mass borrowing and unemployment. People said that we were nuts and silly. We all know what happened: our pathetic Ministers pleaded that they were terribly sorry, that they could not borrow any more money or add to unemployment, and had to chuck the ERM.

We should realise what is happening in France. It is a lovely country, but more unemployment is being created every day because of the absurd nonsense of an artificial exchange rate. Surely Conservatives, of all people, accept that if we pretend that something is worth what it is not, we create distortions. As we see from the Red Book, the greatest problem of all is the distortion created by the agriculture policy, which does not allow food to find its normal price. Clever people in their blue ties, probably supported by public opinion polls, say, "Let us decide what the price of beef and sugar will be." All that we do is spend more and more each year on destroying food and forcing up prices for low-income households who have suffered enormously from the effects of the common agricultural policy.

When I hear representatives of the Labour party talking about "the Europe of the people", I ask them, in all sincerity—as people whose party used to justify democracy—what the blazes people in Europe can do if they think that the CAP is a foul protection racket that is costing enormous sums in waste and destruction, which gives them no entitlement and no rights. Destroying democracy is particularly bad for this country.

Let me make two brief points. The Minister said, "We must tell them what they are doing." I read through the articles in these wretched treaties: that is probably why I do not sleep well at night. The trouble with European treaties is that they can always be stretched a great deal further. According to article 103(4) of the Maastricht treaty, the European Union is not just interested in what

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

we are doing, and how brilliant the Government's economics are; it wants to find out whether our economic policies are inconsistent with the broad guidelines, and may jeopardise the proper functioning of economic and monetary union.

What on earth does that mean? Does it mean that the Government have an obligation—as I believe they have, under the treaty—not only to run the economy in accordance with the principles that have been laid down, although that means deliberately creating unemployment, but to implement policies that will not in any way frustrate the operation of economic and monetary union? To some extent, our policies are doing that. Unemployment in all the other European countries is rising, while ours is falling, and our sound pound is probably having a frustrating effect. That is not helping those countries at all.

It is clear that, under another funny little clause—paragraph 7 of article 104c—Her Majesty's Government do not tell the House of Commons what the Europeans say about the information that we have sent to them. I think that that is the least that the House of Commons is entitled to: surely, when we send our annual information bulletin to Europe, we should be told what the Europeans say in reply to the Government. If, for example, they say to the Government, "We think that you are spending too much on this or that, or borrowing too much," or, "We think that your promises will lead to all kinds of problems," should not the House of Commons be told? I hope that the Government will give an assurance that, notwithstanding paragraph 7 of article 104c, they will endeavour to report back to Parliament any recommendations made by the European Council on the management of the United Kingdom economy. If the Minister can say yes to that, I shall be very grateful.

Will the Government also give an undertaking that Her Majesty's Government will seek to initiate a review within the European Union, of the merits of seeking economic advice from nations that have created an economic nightmare and massive unemployment in their domestic economies?

I have quite a lot to do with Sweden. Being a Tory, I have a massive number of important business interests, one of which is a directorship of a wonderful company called Ansvar Insurance. Ansvar Insurance insures total abstainers from alcohol, a cause that I have always promoted because I signed the pledge in Glasgow when I was six—and, like all Conservatives, I have kept my promise ever since. We do not pay the directors a great deal of money, but we give a great deal of support to the temperance movement.

I am astonished at what has happened in Sweden. The people there were told by the clever people—the equivalent of our silly Confederation of British Industry—"Let's vote yes in the referendum to safeguard employment and prosperity." Of course, the poor old Swedes voted yes, by 51 to 49 or thereabouts. I just wish that the EU enthusiasts would visit Sweden today. The situation there is tragic: everything is going wrong. Taxes are rising, public spending is being cut, and things have gone from bad to worse since the Swedes listened to the clever people and voted yes. Their friends from Norway go over to laugh at them, and to say, "You were daft." I am well acquainted with public opinion in Sweden, and I know that the massive majority believe that getting involved with the European Union is the worst thing that they have ever done.

The final point that I hope the Minister will bear in mind is that the people who loathe and despise the European Union are in no sense anti-European. Basically, the Euro-sceptics are probably more pro-European than some of the people who shout for Brussels. Basically, we like Europe. We like the comforts of Europe and we deplore what the Europeans are doing to themselves. I just hope that people in all the parties will wake up to what is actually happening in Europe today. There is the absolute tragedy in Germany, where the Germans have created a massive nonsense of unemployment because of a single currency there. They never seemed to consider what would happen. They said to the poor people in East Germany, who of course had lots of problems, "We shall give you the special privilege of making the deutschmark equal to the currency of East Germany." It did not help East Germany. It simply created mass unemployment. It was nonsense and it was silly.

There are also tragedies in France, Italy, Spain, where things are particularly bad, and Belgium, probably the worst of all. I just wish that people would wake up to what is happening, stop trying to convince themselves of silly slogans and realise that what is happening in the European Union is not only bad for Europe and for its people, but destroying democracy and jobs. Some time, people must wake up.

4.40 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): One sometimes goes to public meetings and there is a discussion afterwards. Someone gets up and says, "Mr. Chairman, I did not intend to contribute to this meeting before I came into the hall." I had not intended to take part in the debate until we heard a couple of speeches, particularly that of the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies). Unusually, not many Labour Members wish to contribute. I took his invitation to add a few words. I thank him for his kind words. Although I disagree with him profoundly on politics, dependent on his successor, any non-return of him to the House would be a loss of someone who has, in a sphere other than finance, brought distinction to a particular Select Committee. I shall leave it at that.

I wish to take up the fundamental points on which the hon. Gentleman and I had a brief exchange. The reason why I did not intend to participate was that I intended to listen to a Select Committee that is discussing investment in London Transport, but that is a good illustration of the fundamental issues that we are discussing—economic and monetary union and the criteria with which, to keep their option open, the Government must comply.

I challenged the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding to make a distinction on the source of borrowing for much needed replacements of tunnels, wiring or signalling—the capital investment that everyone in the House, whatever their party, wherever they sit, whatever they think of the Common Market, recognises is badly needed for the people of London, as no doubt it is required in Paris, Berlin, Stockholm, Copenhagen or anywhere else. Therefore, we are talking about the extent to which, if at all, the criteria that we are discussing—my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) mentioned them and the progress towards

the convergence criteria—affect fundamental and democratic choices, in this case, of the people of London or of the people of Great Britain, in respect of other forms of public investment.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding did not contest my point that such investment would be virtually identical, wherever the money came from—whether from the Treasury, which would then borrow on the markets by way of gilts or whatever, or from a private firm buying capital or indeed receiving money indirectly from the Treasury, which the Government proposed yesterday. It would be identical investment in identical infrastructure for broadly the same purpose, that is, the transport of people by underground railway in London.

My understanding is—the Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding did not, so I suspect that I am right—that, if those millions of pounds were added to public expenditure, they would count against the 3 per cent. gross domestic product limit, which is part of the convergence criteria, as expenditure would be to the 60 per cent. GDP limit in relation to total Government borrowing. Those details are in the Red Book.

Chapter 5 of the Red Book, headed "Public Spending", makes it clear that public expenditure is being enhanced by the private finance initiative. Paragraph 5.17 contains an interesting phrase:

"Public services benefit not just from direct public sector investment but also from capital spending by the private sector under the Private Finance Initiative . . . Table 5.4 shows total capital spending sponsored by the public sector"—

the next bit is important—

"including the increasingly significant contribution through the PFI."

The paragraph refers to

"capital spending sponsored by the public sector".

However, table 5.4 makes it clear that the PFI will play an important part in future. In the estimated outturn for 1996–97, the total public sector capital expenditure is £19.7 billion and the PFI is £1.1 billion. Those figures change to £17.7 billion—that is a drop, presumably at constant prices—in 1999–2000 and £4.3 billion respectively. Perhaps in his winding-up speech the Minister will confirm those figures.

While total public sector capital expenditure will count towards the criteria ceilings, the additional amount via the PFI, which will be substantial if the Government are returned to office and continue with their programmes—and another Government might be forced into them—will not. Effectively, it is all investment in public sector areas. The lack of a fundamental distinction between those two figures is clear in paragraph 5.18 of the Red Book, which states:

"even these figures can give a misleading picture of the level of investment . . . When the Government buys services from the private sector, investment undertaken by the companies that provide the services is not counted as public sector investment; very often, however, it involves the formation of assets which are deployed to meet public needs."

That means that if a public body has a high proportion of contractors, the capital for those contractors will come from the private sector. Although it may be devoted entirely to public works, it will not qualify for the expenditure criteria. My supposition goes further, because the Red Book states:

"The boundary of the sector has shifted. The privatisation programme has brought significant qualitative and quantitative benefits from capital investment in industries which used to be predominantly in the public sector."

My remarks are fundamental to our debates, and relate especially to hon. Members who may prefer public and private expenditure in any combination. Is it not true that the nature of the criteria for qualifying for economic and monetary union, about which one can argue—it is either a necessity or the limit—is distinct from the principle? I maintain that these are two different but complementary issues. Will they not affect the degree of public and private investment and control, and the boundary of which the Red Book speaks? However, they do not alter, as in the case of London Underground, the sums that are involved, or—given that they are roughly equivalent—the degree to which they affect the country's economy.

Why are the criteria there? I can only conclude, as the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding made fairly clear, that those who set the criteria and who sustain and believe in them, understand that they press one way or the other on that boundary between public and private capital. They therefore control the mixture and believe that, inherently, private capital is more efficient and must be maximised, while public investment must be minimised. That is his doctrinaire thesis—although a Marxist would have it the other way round.

The Labour party and many Opposition Members have believed in a mixed economy, and in the most beneficial mixture of both sources of capital. It looks as if the European Monetary Institute's criteria—regardless of whether one is in favour of them—are pressing unfairly in one direction, thus constraining the democratic right of the electorate to choose the balance that they wish.

4.49 pm

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the significant progress that he is making in meeting the Maastricht convergence criteria. The inflation level set in the Red Book certainly meets the criteria as defined in the Maastricht treaty, our debt to GDP ratio is one of the most satisfactory in Europe and the projections for our budget deficit as a percentage of GDP are well within the 3 per cent. level, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) mentioned earlier in the debate.

My right hon. and learned Friend's progress in achieving the convergence criteria leads me to the recent remarks of Jacques Santer, the European Union President. He said:

"We have never had such convergent policies in the economic fundamentals, inflation rates, interest rates and so on."

In one sense, he is absolutely right; in another, he is absolutely wrong. The United Kingdom is certainly achieving some of the Maastricht convergence criteria, such as that on inflation, and it is making considerable progress towards meeting the debt to GDP criteria. Clearly, the UK will also achieve the overall debt to GDP ratio. In another sense, however, we are in no way convergent with many of the economies of Europe.

I draw particular attention to the fourth criterion, on the currency, under article 109j of the Maastricht treaty. I recommend that hon. Members visit the Library, obtain

[Mr. Barry Legg]

a copy of the February 1997 inflation report and examine chart 213, which shows the movement of sterling against the deutschmark over the past 14 months. In that period, sterling has appreciated by 22.5 per cent. against the deutschmark. The chart also shows sterling's appreciation, at 4 per cent., against the dollar.

I urge hon. Members who support the idea of a single currency and those who are agnostic—those who do not know whether it would be a good thing and cannot make up their minds on the matter—to examine the chart and to ask themselves two questions. First, what would have happened to the German and UK economies if there had been no exchange rate and they had had the same currencies? What adjustments would have to be made in those economies if there was no exchange rate flexibility? Such an exchange rate movement reflects a realignment of the exchange rate, which reveals underlying pressures within the individual economies.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): Rubbish.

Mr. Legg: If we did not have an exchange rate, there would be considerable regional booms and slumps and there would have to be significant transfer payments. The chart clearly shows that the German and UK economic cycles are not synchronised, and that the UK economic cycle is much closer to that of the US.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I am afraid that the currency fluctuations to which my hon. Friend referred prove a point opposite to his argument. Sterling fell out of the exchange rate mechanism at a parity of DM2.95. The rate fell at one time to DM2.17 and is now back to, I think, DM2.72—it is certainly over DM2.7. Those fluctuations do not make sense. They do not correspond to fundamentals. We are back almost to where we started, but in the meantime, enormous and gratuitous uncertainty about costs has been caused to traders and to business.

Mr. Legg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He has added to my arguments. He has shown that we need considerable exchange rate flexibility. The rate has floated, varying freely in accordance with the market since we left the ERM. The United Kingdom economy has benefited substantially from that. I am afraid that my hon. Friend has strengthened my case.

We have heard that there should not be fudging of the criteria. I urge my hon. Friends to think carefully about that. Many of them say that joining the single currency should be our objective; but when exchange rate fluctuations are pointed out, they say that they do not want to be judged by the fourth criterion. They want to put the exchange rate stability criterion aside. That is a considerable fudge. We should be saying that we need exchange rate flexibility, which is good for our economy. That is one reason why we should not envisage joining a single currency.

The Red Book and the inflation report give a good idea of some of the convergence criteria that we are achieving, but they also show that in no way is the UK economy so convergent with the German economy that they should have the same currency. There are considerable structural differences between the two economies. Can anyone argue that this would be a good time for the UK and Germany to have the same currency when Germany clearly has to deal with substantial structural problems in its economy? The social costs in the German economy are high. Unemployment has recently gone up by 500,000. There are 4.7 million unemployed in Germany, with another 2 million on make-work schemes, and there are very few real jobs in east Germany. It would be economic nonsense for Britain and Germany to have the same currency at the moment.

Those are the economic arguments. However, too much concentration on the convergence criteria obscures what economic and monetary union is all about. Historically, states have adopted single currencies for political reasons, because of a perceived common interest in those states that justified having one Government and one currency. Looking at the convergence criteria obstructs that view. Having a single currency is not just another step in the process of achieving greater economic co-operation, as the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) seems to think; it is a step that inevitably leads to a single state and a single Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding seemed to swallow that line. He thought that, if we joined a single currency, we would have financial prudence for ever and a day—no longer would it be possible not to have prudent financial policies. He was wrong. The wording of the convergence criteria is flexible. There is no 3 per cent. limit. The deficit qualification says—

Mr. Radice: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Legg: I have very little time. I have already given way. I should prefer to continue making my points.

The deficit qualification says that, if the deficit is only exceptional and temporary, the 3 per cent. limit can be ignored. As we have not yet achieved the holy grail of a 3 per cent. deficit, in which of the four years of this Parliament that we have not been able to achieve a 3 per cent. deficit does my hon. Friend the Exchequer Secretary consider the excess to have been "exceptional and temporary"? That phrase provides the let-out for the European single currency.

Economies cannot operate in a formulaic way. Political judgments will have to be made. In respect of the single currency, political judgments will be made by European institutions. The economy cannot run on autopilot. Bureaucrats and politicians will have to make political judgments. That is why the single currency is becoming more unpopular in the United Kingdom and why more of my hon. Friends feel that we should not go ahead with it.

One would think that the fact that we were achieving the criteria set out in the Red Book would lead to greater confidence on the Conservative Benches that we should go for the single currency, but the reverse is happening: there is more scepticism about the single currency among my hon. Friends, because they realise that a political project lies behind it. They have seen many examples over the past four years of political power having been given up to European institutions. They now understand the political power that would have to be given up along with the currency. The regulations before Christmas concerning the stability pact made that absolutely clear.

Under the conditions in those regulations, it was clear that no delay from national institutions in implementing the excess deficits procedure would be countenanced.

That means that the House would have to comply with the directions that it received from Europe concerning levels of spending and taxation, and the ancient rights of the House would be taken away. I believe that the single currency is becoming more unpopular among my hon. Friends because of that wider realisation. They can see the political consequences that lie behind it.

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Legg: No. I am coming to the end of my speech.

I remind the House of what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer told the Treasury Select Committee in December. He said:

"The single currency is a one way option".

If we take the single currency, there is no going back.

Last week, the House debated devolution and whether powers could be removed from a Scottish Assembly or Parliament once it had been set up. On the single currency, we have the answer: it is a one-way option and there is no going back. It represents an irreversible transfer of power from the House to European institutions, and for that reason alone it will never go ahead with the United Kingdom participating.

5.2 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I enjoyed the speech by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South–West (Mr. Legg), but I could not for the life of me work out whether the convergence criteria were a straitjacket, as we heard previously, or some type of rubber corset inasmuch as they were indefinitely expandable. I was curious about the hon. Gentleman's scenario on what should happen. In effect, he was saying that Europe should disintegrate into 15 separate states, each with its own currency, monetary and, ultimately, trade policy. I do not believe that the single market for which I expect he voted, as did most Conservative Members present, is achievable without a level of co-operation and, ultimately, a single currency. Getting there will be difficult; that is for sure.

I rise in particular to respond to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who gently invited me to get lost. That is strong parliamentary language. I am Irish and I rise to such suggestions. The hon. Gentleman is friendly on many other issues, but when he used the language of loathe and despise, I found that much more worrying than a passing ad hominem remark. That language, like the language of hostility from the Foreign Secretary last week, reveals something deeper and more worrying in the Conservative party. I shall be interested to hear whether the Exchequer Secretary confirms the Euro-scepticism of which he was boasting in a debate in the House before Christmas, aligning himself with the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), or whether he chooses to side with his nominal boss, the Chancellor.

One would think from the remarks of the hon. Member for Southend, East that the past 18 years had been a miracle of low unemployment in this country, but some of us who may not have been sitting on the Conservative Benches at the time have memories of when unemployment went through the roof before entry to the exchange rate mechanism. Some of us believe that the lowered unemployment that we have today may not last.

There is also the problem that, if one measured unemployment in this country using the same criteria as Germany and France—the International Labour Organisation criteria—it would be higher. If one included the criteria used by the American Bureau of National Labor Statistics, which includes people who would like a job but cannot get one, a further 2 million people would have to be added to our unemployment total. Those are inconvenient facts; facts washed away by a diatribe against the problems that Europe faces on unemployment.

The fusion of two countries—a third-world country with a third-world economy such as East Germany and a successful West Germany—was bound to cause problems. The hon. Member for Southend, East seemed to imply that Germany should have run with two currencies in one country. I have heard of the Chinese one country, two systems but never of one modern economy with two competing currencies, as he seemed to imply should have been the choice of the German Chancellor and the Bundesbank in 1990.

I invite the hon. Member for Southend, East to be careful about quoting opinion polls. He completely misunderstood what I said. In the early 1980s, every opinion poll in this country showed that a majority of people were for withdrawal from the European Community. That was the policy adopted by my party in 1983, and a fat lot of good it did us. What people say in opinion polls and how they vote are two very different things. When the British people are invited in the forthcoming election to decide between a party that has set forward clear positions to defend British interests but advance in Europe and a party that is full of the language of loathing, despising and hostility, we shall see which way they vote, just as we shall see which way people vote in future elections in Europe. The people of Europe do not want to break themselves down into competing, rivalry-driven states, which is the avenue and vision offered by Conservative Members.

5.7 pm

Mr. Oppenheim: I particularly enjoyed the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), especially the part when he managed to say something to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) that many of us have longed to say for a long time: get lost. I also particularly enjoyed his comments on the common agricultural policy, with which I agree 100 per cent. He asked about paragraph 7 of article 104c and whether we publish the Commission's response. The answer is yes—in the form of a written answer, which is placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East also suggested that Sweden has suffered as a result of European Union membership. I suggest that the cause of major problems in Sweden is the cumulative effect of years of socialism—very high spending, borrowing and debt. It now has to adopt monetarist policies and policies of fiscal prudence and deregulation to try to turn its economy round.

My hon. Friend also correctly argued that one can like Europe very much but be against the European Union. Those who are pro-European Union often try to tar Euro-sceptics, or those who are hostile to the EU, as hostile to Europe, but that is not always the case.

The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) is always an assiduous contributor to these debates. He made an excellent point about the nature of public and

[Mr. Oppenheim]

private investment and how they relate to the public sector borrowing requirement. His comments were absolutely right, except that borrowing by public corporations is excluded from the general Government financial deficit, which is the definition of Government borrowing for Maastricht and convergence purposes, as indeed are privatisation proceeds; so, for the purposes of the general deficit, it makes no difference whether borrowing is private or public.

The same applies to borrowing under the private finance initiative, which would be counted in the private sector, but, even if it was public sector, it would not count as public borrowing for Maastricht or convergence purposes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South–West (Mr. Legg) made several points about convergence, with which hon. Members of all parties would broadly agree. He rightly said that convergence had not yet been achieved and that many would argue that it was unlikely to be achieved if European economies continued on their current course.

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend will forgive me if I proceed for the moment, as I do not have much time and I want to respond to a number of points made during the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South–West also made the point that to proceed would ultimately be a political decision, regardless of whether the convergence criteria had been met. That is right, because the Maastricht treaty gives scope for the Economic and Finance Council that will meet next spring, followed by the Council of Heads of Government, to take a political decision; they are not bound by the Maastricht criteria. After that, the stability pact will have a political element. It will not be totally bound by treaty.

Mr. Marlow: We know that the Government are, on balance, hostile to monetary union. If a group of other European countries seeks to go ahead with it on fudged criteria, will the Government seek to block that in the Council of Ministers, as they are entitled to do?

Mr. Oppenheim: No. If other countries wanted to go ahead, even with muddled criteria, it would not be our job to prevent them from doing so. We must go into the negotiations, as we have done, and try to ensure that economic and monetary union is a success, because, in or out, it will affect us in a variety of ways. If our advice is not heeded, and EMU goes ahead without us, it is not our job to block the will of other countries.

The hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) spoke for 24 minutes. Apart from some platitudes about Europe, he spent most of that time criticising our economic performance. I welcome his concentration on the British economy. If it is now so awful, how come new Labour has copied all our policies? The unique selling proposition of new Labour spin doctors seems to be, "Those guys over there have made such a mess of things that we have copied all their policies."

The Labour party has good reason to copy all our policies: we have the lowest debt of any European Union country except Luxembourg and the lowest unemployment by far of any major European Union country.

Mr. MacShane: The figures are not comparable.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman is wrong, because my figures, which are used for Eurostat purposes, are based on the labour force survey, approved by the International Labour Organisation, and the Trades Union Congress has said that they are wholly reliable.

Our borrowing is lower than that of any other major EU economy. We have the highest growth of any major EU economy. Our current account is close to balance and is in a better state than Germany's. Those points were made well by my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies).

The hon. Member for North Warwickshire said that our inflation rate was higher than that of some other European countries. He is right: it is 1 per cent. higher than those of Germany and France, which is not surprising, bearing it in mind that our economy is booming, whereas theirs are in a slump. If only Labour could have achieved an inflation rate 1 per cent. higher than the German and French rate, it would have had something about which to boast.

Since 1979, our growth in manufacturing productivity—the crucial indicator of competitiveness—has been the highest in any Group of Seven major industrial country; it has been 50 per cent. higher than the Japanese rate, twice the French rate and nearly three times the German rate. That is why a recent independent report stated that, since 1979, Britain has closed more than three quarters of the competitiveness gap with Germany.

We export twice as many cars as in 1979 and four times the steel. We are now the world's leading pharmaceutical exporter, and we have overtaken France to become the second largest aerospace producer and exporter.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Minister keeps referring to 1979. Can he explain why unemployment is double what it was then?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding has already answered that point: structural unemployment is growing throughout the developed world, not only in the European Union but in America, where unemployment is far higher, and in Japan. The difference is that, whereas in the 1970s—when, let us not forget, unemployment doubled under Labour—our unemployment was far worse than the European average, today it is far better, and falling. Relative to our main competitors we are doing far better.

The hon. Member for North Warwickshire mentioned the minimum wage as one of new Labour's great Euro-friendly policies, but he cannot tell the House at what level it would be set under a Labour Government.

Mr. MacShane: Very wise.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman smiles and says, "Very wise," but through his smiling face we can see the con that is being perpetrated on the low-paid. It is no good

his throwing kisses at me across the Chamber: that will not get him very far. He is trying to convince the low-paid that there is some easy, no-cost solution to low pay.

We all want higher wages for everyone, especially the low-paid, but to pretend that there is some easy option and that politicians can dictate levels of pay with the wave of a magic wand is an unpleasant and dishonest con. The only way to increase the pay of the low-paid is to improve education standards and the competitiveness of the economy. That is why pay at all levels since 1979 has risen rapidly in comparison with what happened under Labour, when pay for the lowest-paid stagnated.

I am pleased that the hon. Member for North Warwickshire concentrated on the economy, because the economy will win us the election. Most people realise that, although the Government have made some mistakes, by and large we have got things right. That is why, since 1979, we have closed four fifths of the competitiveness gap with Germany, and why new Labour's unique selling proposition is that we have got so much wrong that Labour has copied all our policies.

Amusing and enjoyable though this diversion across the economy has been, the purpose of the debate is to take note of the Government's assessment. There is nothing sinister in the surveillance that it outlines, and I urge the House to support the motion.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14B.*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98 for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.

Contract (Scotland) Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Order for Third Reading read.

5.16 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill will reform what the Scottish Law Commission has identified as three bad rules in contract law. Consultations by the commission established that there was strong and widely held support for reform and that the rules should be abolished as soon as a legislative opportunity arose.

The draft proposals for legislation were published by the Secretary of State in September and have been generally welcomed. They have the support of the Law Society of Scotland and the Confederation of British Industry (Scotland) among others. I was grateful to hon. Members of all parties for their strong support for the Bill on Second Reading and in Committee.

The three rules to be reformed have been responsible for instances of obvious injustice in the past. There is no justification for their continued existence and widespread approval for their abolition. The Bill will reform the law in three important respects and will be of benefit to both the legal profession and the general public. I commend it to the House.

5.18 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I thank the Minister for his comments, which are welcomed by the official Opposition. As he said, the three bad rules in contract law were an impediment to the law in Scotland. It is commendable that the Scottish Law Commission report has sent us on our way to making better contract legislation. I commend the Minister on the way in which the Bill was introduced. The draft Bill was produced in September and sent to interested parties for their comments. That is the proper way to do it, and if other legislation were treated in the same way, we might get better laws.

The Bill will make the Scottish legal system more cogent. The Minister mentioned the Law Society of Scotland, which has been closely involved in the Bill. The Law Society's secretary, Michael Clancy, has commented to me that the society is happy with the Bill, especially the provisions on

"the admissibility of extrinsic evidence to prove an additional term of a contract or unilateral voluntary obligation; the supersession of a contract by a deed executed in implement of it; and the obtaining of damages for breach of contract of sale."

The principle of the Bill is sound, its passage has been commendable, and it will improve Scots law on contract.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Scottish Legal Services Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

FUNCTIONS AND POWERS OF OMBUDSMAN

5.20 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 42, leave out from 'and' to 'the' in line 44.

The Bill is largely uncontroversial. It clarifies and extends the existing powers of the legal services ombudsman, and gives extra powers to the local government ombudsman. We welcome the new power for the legal services ombudsman to recommend that a professional organisation—the Law Society of Scotland or the Faculty of Advocates—should pay compensation of up to £1,000 to a complainant who has suffered loss or distress because of its poor handling of his complaint. The amendment is motivated by our concern about the handing over of confidential information or documents to the ombudsman.

The issue was first raised in the Scottish Grand Committee by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell), my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and myself. The Minister tried to reassure us by saying:

"The ombudsman can require bodies to produce such information only if he considers it to be relevant . . . The ombudsman is concerned only with the Law Society's handling of a case—confidential papers from solicitors' offices are not relevant . . . I am a lawyer . . . I have no desire for the ombudsman to be involved with confidential papers".—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 9 December 1996; c. 74.]

Therefore, we were surprised that a Government amendment was tabled in Committee that provided that the supplying of confidential documents to the ombudsman could not be legally challenged on grounds of breach of confidentiality. To be fair, the amendment contained other changes that we welcomed, but we were surprised by the inclusion of the words:

"notwithstanding any duty of confidentiality owed to any person by the professional organisation as respects any such information or, as the case may be, documents, the organisation shall comply with such a requirement."

We take the view that it would be better to leave that open to legal challenge so that the greatest possible care would be taken in handing over confidential documents. To be fair, the word "relevant" provides some check. Clause 1 also states:

"the ombudsman . . . may require the professional organisation . . . to provide him with such information, being information which is within the knowledge of the professional organisation, as he considers relevant to his investigation; or . . . to produce to him such documents, being documents which are within the possession or control of the organisation, as he considers relevant to his investigation".

The question of who decides what is relevant still arises, and the answer is that the ombudsman decides. In Committee, the Minister also told us:

"the Secretary of State for Scotland will direct the ombudsman to use only information or documents that are obtained in the exercise of his powers in connection with his statutory functions."—[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 28 January 1997; c. 5.]

That may provide some small comfort, but other checks are necessary.

I considered tabling an amendment to provide that the consent of the complainant should be required before documents were released. If our amendment is accepted, it would be wise for the consent of the complainant to be obtained before confidential documents are handed over, because that would give the Law Society and the Faculty of Advocates some protection. However, the wording "with the consent of the complainant" would not have covered every eventuality, because the confidential documents could belong to someone else, as the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East pointed out in Committee.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): He did a good job.

Mr. Chisholm: I agree. The hon. and learned Gentleman made a helpful speech in Committee. Although I accepted the substance of his amendment, I was not entirely happy with the wording, which is why I have tabled my amendment today.

The amendment is partly about protecting the interests of third parties. In Committee, the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East gave the example of an accident involving two passengers in a car. The complainant might agree to his medical documents being handed over but the other passenger might not. The example of medical records is the most obvious type of document that some people might not want handed over, because they contain confidential information about previous medical history.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am grateful to my hon. Friend, although I do not know why, after this morning's performance. The Minister's performance was even worse. They both talked about E. coli 0157, when they should have been talking about the care of the elderly.

If the amendment is not accepted, could the ombudsman overrule a complainant's legitimate objections about confidential documents and acquire them anyway?

Mr. Chisholm: That is precisely the point. The Bill would give the ombudsman the power to do so, if it is not amended. The Minister tried to answer the point about medical records in Committee. He said:

"Medical records could be released only with the consent of the individual concerned . . . consent is implied when a complaint is made".—[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 28 January 1997; c. 14.]

That may sound contradictory, but it amounts to saying that consent would not have to be specifically asked for because it would be implied when the complaint was made. In other words, the power of the ombudsman will override confidentiality. That power is not held by the local government ombudsman or the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. Indeed, the Parliamentary Commissioner must seek the agreement of a complainer before confidential documents are handed over.

In Committee, it was suggested that if an amendment such as this were passed, it would obstruct the ombudsman in the course of his necessary and welcome

duties. The last thing that we want is to obstruct the ombudsman going about his duties. Before Committee, we had many representations from the Consumers Association and other bodies saying that they wanted the Bill. The point is that the ombudsman would still have recourse, if documents that he thought were essential for an investigation were withheld, to apply to a sheriff by way of summary procedure for an order determining whether such information should be provided.

5.30 pm

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is some logic in all the ombudsmen having precisely the same powers and remit, so that there is no confusion in the public mind? I can see no argument at all for this ombudsman having powers greater than those of, say, the Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland. I do not understand what the Government are doing.

Mr. Chisholm: My hon. Friend makes a good and pertinent point. Consistency is not a hallmark of the Government, but perhaps the Minister can rise to the challenge of that point when he replies. It is up to the Government to explain the discrepancy between the powers of the legal services ombudsman under the Bill and those of other ombudsmen.

Those concerns were expressed on Second Reading and in Committee. We approached the matter in various ways. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East suggested one formulation that was not successful. We suggest the simple expedient of deleting the words that mean that confidentiality will be overridden. Our amendment would mean that the ombudsman would have to be much more careful about demanding confidential documents. If he must get such documents, there will still be recourse in law. The amendment provides the necessary protection for individuals whose records are held by lawyers or the Law Society.

I am sure that my hon. Friends wish to speak because they have concerns. The amendment does not mean that we want to water down the powers of the legal services ombudsman or the scope of Bill. We welcome the Bill and the new powers, and we do not believe that the amendment will damage them. However, it is important to write safeguards into the Bill for those whose confidential records may be held by the legal profession.

Mr. Norman Hogg: I listened with interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm). I want to return to the point that I made in support of the amendment.

It is not very helpful to look at the amendment because it simply deletes some words. I hope that, when the Minister replies, he will be able to say exactly why this ombudsman should have a remit different from those of the other ombudsmen in Scottish statute. The public could become confused about the powers of ombudsmen if we give each of them different powers. I understand that they operate in different areas and that this ombudsman operates in a specialist area relating to one profession, whereas the local government ombudsman deals with many professions and many functions discharged by local authorities. To a lesser extent, that is true of the health service ombudsman. The Bill deals with a specialist ombudsman who is to have different powers. Why do we always seem to be giving lawyers different and better regulations from the ones that we give to everyone else?

Dr. Godman: Quite right.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) says that I am quite right. I am encouraged to proceed further. I hope that the Minister, who is himself a distinguished lawyer—

Dr. Godman: He is an advocate.

Mr. Hogg: The Minister is no less than a Scottish advocate—someone who is really to be respected. I hope that he will say why lawyers are, as usual, being treated differently. Why should the regulations that affect this ombudsman be more extensive than those for other ombudsmen who cover professions of equal status and of equal importance to Scottish society? If he does that, he may be able to convince me that this Bill has merit as it stands. At present, I think that the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Leith is sound.

Dr. Godman: I have no doubt that the Minister will employ all his legal skills to defeat the amendment but, even though he is a lawyer, he must agree that complainers must have complete trust in the handling of complaints by the ombudsman. He will have received complaints from constituents—not many; they do not come along very often—and, like the rest of us, he will have sent to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration complaints that have been raised with him. I recently sent one. I explained the position in detail to my constituent, who believes that he has a complaint against a Department of State—not the Scottish Office, I hasten to add. It is welcome to have such an ombudsman, because, God knows, lawyers need to be monitored.

Lawyers are the most conservative profession in the land. They are as conservative as the medical profession. It is right and proper that people can take complaints to an ombudsman. The Law Society and the lay observer perform important functions, but the question of confidential documents is important. I raised the matter in Committee with the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch).

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch) *indicated dissent.*

Dr. Godman: Perhaps I raised it with the Minister of State.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) *indicated assent.*

Dr. Godman: I might add in passing that the Minister of State is far more handsome than the other Minister—not that he behaved very handsomely towards me in this morning's Adjournment debate. This question of confidential documents is important. It is all very well for the Minister of State to laugh—he is behaving like a typical Edinburgh lawyer.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, had the hon. Member for

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) not asked so many questions, I would have spent much longer answering his points? However, the hon. Member for Leith raised serious issues, which I answered.

Dr. Godman: You see what I mean, Madam Deputy Speaker—a typical Edinburgh lawyer. I suspect that he was trained in the Edinburgh faculty and not in Glasgow—he has not got that Glasgow look about him.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I had better give the hon. Gentleman a gentle warning that—interesting though his observations are—he is now going rather wide of the amendment.

Mr. Norman Hogg: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that my hon. Friend is out of order, I really do.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Would the hon. Gentleman like to come and do my job?

Mr. Hogg: Who told you that that was what I wanted?

Dr. Godman: You are famous for your gentle reprimands, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall not stray again, but I could not resist having a wee go at the Edinburgh lawyer opposite.

To return to a serious point, there are legal cases involving medical records that deal with matters that are not only confidential but extremely intimate. The Minister knows that I have been seeking to assist several women in my constituency who suffered grievously because of the malfunctioning of the Inverclyde cervical smear programme. Those women had to seek legal advice in order to pursue, rightly and properly, their case against Argyll and Clyde health board. I have spoken to the Minister about those cases, which illustrate perfectly the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm).

The women—there are, thank heavens, few of them—have had to give all kinds of information to their legal representatives. If one of those women wanted to raise a complaint and approach the legal ombudsman, she should have the right to say, "Yes, by all means you may have access to all of my confidential records." Conversely, she should also have the right to say, "No, there are certain documents that I do not want to be released to the ombudsman." In addition, I do not like the ombudsman being able to appeal to the Secretary of State.

All kidding aside, I appeal to the Minister of State to treat the amendment with the seriousness that it deserves. If he cannot accept the amendment, I ask him to give an assurance that the leaflets that go out to citizens advice bureaux and libraries telling people how to apply to the legal ombudsman will contain a paragraph on the issue of confidential documents.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): It has been a long time since I participated in a Scottish debate. Not only does being here give me a feeling of déjà vu, but the Minister of State's presence doubles that sensation. Not only is he an Edinburgh lawyer, as my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) said, but he is a former Edinburgh councillor. He and I crossed swords in another chamber on many occasions and I have great respect not only for his legal ability, but for his wit and perception. I know that he will be able to deal with all the points raised.

I want to raise a serious point, but I will not keep the House long in doing so. It follows on from the remarks that my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) made earlier about lawyers being treated differently, because one of the matters that concerns me is the method of self-regulation. Admittedly, the legal services ombudsman is outwith the legal system, but until a complaint reaches that stage all complaints against lawyers are dealt with by lawyers and by the Law Society in particular.

5.45 pm

I do not know about other hon. Members' experience, but I have found that when complaints are made by Members of Parliament on behalf of constituents who have experienced problems with lawyers and legal firms, the Law Society does not deal efficiently and effectively with those complaints. I have engaged in long correspondence with the Law Society about several complaints against lawyers. I shall not mention all the cases—to do so would take far too long and would be far too tedious—but I want to refer to two in order to illustrate the problems. The issue of confidentiality comes into those cases.

I do not know whether the Minister remembers the case of the crooked lawyer, Graeme Adam, who practised in Ayrshire during the 1980s, at a time when many miners were receiving large redundancy payments. I know that my hon. Friends will remember the time when the current Deputy Prime Minister was closing pits that were allegedly uneconomic, but which would still be running today had he not shut them down. Various individuals and organisations rushed in to give the miners advice on how to invest their redundancy money. One of those was the solicitor Graeme Adam, who was subsequently imprisoned for having embezzled the money paid to miners for their long periods of service in the mines.

What had happened was clear to the miners, to me as their representative and to people with whom I discussed the case, but when I raised the problems with the Law Society, I found that the presumption which applied within that organisation was that the lawyer was automatically innocent and that that sort of thing could not happen. That attitude was displayed throughout the organisation, all the way up to the then secretary, Kenneth Pritchard. The Law Society was dismissive of the miners' complaints.

That has happened on several occasions when I have raised constituents' complaints about lawyers. The Law Society's presumption is always that such problems cannot happen and that lawyers do not do that sort of thing—they are honourable men and women who cannot possibly involved in wrongdoing. As a result of that presumption, many people have had to fight hard to get justice out of the Law Society, which takes a great deal of time and effort.

Dr. Godman: In view of his criticism of the Law Society, does my hon. Friend nevertheless agree that those

persons who have performed the role of lay observer have done so with remarkable distinction and that that role is close to that of the ombudsman?

Mr. Foulkes: I certainly accept that, but I would be straying from the amendment if I pursued the point.

What worries me is that the people whom I represented were not getting all the information. Disclosure of information and issues of confidentiality are extremely important in such cases. At one point, I had to take a deputation of legal clients to the Law Society to get it to look into the problems relating to Graeme Adam. The Law Society's attitude was unbelievable—implying that it was the clients who were mistaken and that the lawyer was in the right. In the end, in the case of Graeme Adam we found that the opposite was true.

I hesitate to go into detail, but confidentiality is also important in cases of child abuse or sexual abuse. Such cases are being highlighted currently by the *Daily Record*. I have great respect for that newspaper, but it is ironic that it is now highlighting the problems of child abuse and the threat to young children from convicted paedophiles. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow will remember the Ayrshire child abuse case, which I dealt with some months ago. On that occasion the *Daily Record* took the other side of the argument. I suppose that it is the privilege of the fourth estate to take such a contradictory line.

I have made a complaint to the Law Society about a Glasgow lawyer, Mr. Paul Burns, who made statements during the Ayrshire child abuse case which were critical of social workers in Ayrshire and which I believe were unjustified. The Law Society has rejected that complaint and said that I now have the opportunity of going to the Scottish legal services ombudsman, which I am considering.

When one complains about a lawyer, there is always the feeling that one will not get anywhere and that the Law Society will not look at the case in detail. As my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow said, the legal profession in Scotland is a relatively small and closed profession. There is no better example of a closed shop, especially the advocates.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): My hon. Friend will know that I worked in a law company for five years and I saw one side of it. However, as a regional councillor and now as a Member of Parliament, I have met many people who feel that the legal profession is a fortress that cannot be penetrated and that one needs to be towing the Bank of Scotland to be able to afford to purchase justice. Using the ombudsman is the right course for folk with a problem, but ordinary men and women in the street are terrified; they believe that lawyers are God's gift to man and that one cannot have a go at them. In my constituency, there was a horrifying case of a person who was impoverished by over £100,000; he was totally innocent, but the Law Society could not do anything about it.

Mr. Foulkes: I understand only too well the problems that my hon. Friend has experienced.

I just want to express my concerns. One puts a great deal of trust in a lawyer, whether one is buying a house or dealing with other legal issues. The profession is a closed shop and we have to go to lawyers to get things done. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to trust a lawyer. I believe that that trust has broken down in Scotland in a number of cases in the past few years. Many of my constituents are concerned about the legal profession. It needs to pull its socks up.

The Law Society needs to ensure that complaints against solicitors are dealt with quickly, efficiently and effectively, and its consideration of them must be seen to be as fair as possible. That means something different from self-regulation. An independent element needs to be introduced in a decisive way. I hope that the Minister will take account of my points when dealing with the amendment.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Govan): In view of the criticisms about lawyers and the Law Society, will the Minister accept that one way of resolving the difficulties would be to abolish the Law Society's powers to exercise self-regulation over the profession? We may have reached a point at which we accept that for lawyers self-regulation can be shown to have worked not in the public interest but only in the interests of the profession.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This has been a useful debate and many important points have been raised. In answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Davidson), I should say that we wish to avoid excessive regulation. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) raised some important points in that connection. It has been the view of successive Governments that the legal profession should police itself. Under the Solicitors (Scotland) Act 1980, the object of the Law Society is the promotion of the interests of the solicitors' profession in Scotland and the interests of the public in relation to that profession.

As has been said, we do receive complaints, but in general we are satisfied that the system works well. I am encouraged by the fact that the Scottish legal services ombudsman supports the present system of self-regulation and suggests that few advantages would be gained from wholesale change.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley will be assisted if I say that the Law Society's three complaints committees all have four lay members out of a total of 14. A lay member is regularly called on to prepare the report on a complaint for the committee to consider, particularly when it is clear that a lay person's perception of events may differ markedly from that of a member of the profession.

Mr. Foulkes: Can the Minister say who chooses the lay members? Is it the Law Society?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes, but they must be independent of the Law Society and the legal profession. The Scottish legal services ombudsman must be a lay person and is prevented by statute from being a solicitor, advocate or other member of the legal profession. There is no special pleading on behalf of my profession. The lay person is able to have a different perspective to oversee the process and to ensure that it works fairly.

The hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) raised important issues about whether there is a discrepancy in the ombudsman's powers. The legal

[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton]

services ombudsman looks at how a professional organisation handles a complaint, not the complaint itself. The local government ombudsman and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration look at the complaint itself, so the remits and powers are different.

The legal ombudsman must be able to look at all the papers that a professional organisation has considered. The handling of the complaint must be relevant. The hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth asked for consistency. I can confirm that the local government ombudsman and the Parliamentary Commissioner may require any member or officer of the body being investigated or any other person who in their view is able to furnish information or produce relevant documents to do so. There is no suggestion that confidential documents or information would be considered exempt.

In Committee, I told the hon. Gentleman that I had no desire for confidential material to be produced. I was talking about confidential material that was not relevant to the handling of the complaint. The amendment would remove the provision that the professional organisation's duty to provide relevant information or documents supersedes any duty of confidentiality that the organisation owes to another person. The provision is essential to ensure that the ombudsman has access to all relevant information.

The important word is "relevant". The ombudsman investigates the organisation's handling of a complaint, not the actual complaint. Any information or documents required have to be relevant to the consideration of the complaint. It is right that the ombudsman should have access to all relevant documents so that he can investigate the matter properly. The current provision in the Bill puts the existing practice on a statutory basis and provides protection for the professional organisations.

The complainer who has asked the ombudsman to investigate the handling of a case would have no reason to complain that the ombudsman had seen documents which would otherwise be confidential. It is in the interest of the complainer that the ombudsman should have access to the relevant information. Documents containing confidential information relating to third parties—a point raised by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm)—would be unlikely to be relevant to the way in which the organisation handled the complaint. They are therefore unlikely to be required by the ombudsman.

I understand hon. Members' concern to prevent confidential information obtained by the ombudsman from being misused. I give an undertaking to the House that the Secretary of State for Scotland will issue the ombudsman with a direction that he should use such information or documents only in exercising his powers in connection with his statutory functions, and should ensure that his staff do likewise.

Dr. Godman: What size staff is envisaged for investigations? Will the Minister advise the ombudsman to ensure that leaflets are published which can be given to people—for instance, in citizens advice bureaux?

Lord James Douglas–Hamilton: The staff will be sufficient to handle matters effectively. An annual report will be published in due course.

I hope that the hon. Member for Leith will not press the amendment.

6 pm

Mr. Chisholm: I thank the Minister for his reply. I agree with him that the word "relevant" is relevant. We hope that it will never be necessary for confidential documentation to be handed over.

I thank my hon. Friends for their valuable contributions. I support everything that was said by them, with the possible exception of the remarks about Edinburgh by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). I have a certain Edinburgh solidarity with the Minister of State, the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas–Hamilton), who represents a neighbouring constituency to mine and is poaching some of my constituency for the general election, although I do not think that he will get many votes from that area.

We shall keep a close watch on the way in which the Bill operates, and pay particular attention to problems with confidential documents.

Mr. Davidson: I endorse the welcome given by my hon. Friend to the contributions made by our hon. Friends. I take it that he agrees with the criticisms of the Law Society. It can be said that professional self-regulation by lawyers has now received a yellow card. It will be closely monitored during the term of the next Labour Government, with a view to possible abolition.

Mr. Chisholm: I am not sure how wide a topic was covered by my hon. Friend's remarks, so I shall be careful in replying. It was an interesting point.

I do not intend to press the amendment to a Division.

Amendment negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

6.2 pm

Lord James Douglas–Hamilton: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I could speak at immense length, but I think that we have given the subject a general airing.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 1

EMERGENCY POWER OF ENTRY

'.—(1) Section 8(2) of the 1961 Act shall be amended by inserting at the beginning, "Subject to the next following section".

(2) After section 8(2) there shall be inserted—

"(2A) Notwithstanding any provision of this section, any person authorised by a local authority may for the purpose of exercising the duty conferred on that local authority by section 4B above enter any land at any time if he is satisfied that such action is required in a case of emergency.".'.—*[Mr. Chisholm.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

6.3 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

New clause 1 deals with emergency powers of entry with reference to clause 2, which deals with cleansing, repairing and otherwise maintaining watercourses. We welcome the Bill in general and the fact that duties are to be imposed on local councils with reference to the maintenance of watercourses and flood prevention.

The Bill changes the "can" of the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961 into a "must". However, if councils are to fulfil their duties properly, they must have the necessary powers and resources. One issue that we raised in Committee with reference to powers related to fines for dumping. One of the main causes of flooding is dumping in rivers. We argued that the maximum fine should be increased from £1,000 to £2,500. Councils need that power to do their duty, but the proposal was rejected by the Government. That shows, once again, that the Labour party is prepared to be tough on anti-social behaviour.

To do their job properly, councils also need powers of access in an emergency—access to a building or land that causes a serious flood problem. Councils want that power, yet the Government deny it to them. I raised the issue on Second Reading, as did the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie)—I seem to be quoting Liberal Democrat Members rather a lot this evening. The hon. Lady said:

"Such powers could be needed in an emergency such as that which occurred recently in Dunoon. Then, equipment had to be diverted a considerable distance to gain access to a watercourse in flood because a private landowner would not allow access over his stretch of land."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 13 January 1997; c. 65.]

The matter was also raised by me in Committee, as part of a large group of amendments, and it did not merit a great deal of the Minister's time when he replied. He said:

"We, too, want to allow for quicker access to land but we do not consider that access without a warrant is necessary or appropriate."—[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 11 February 1997; c. 18.]

Today, the Minister has an opportunity to amplify that remark.

Section 8 of the 1961 Act provides that admission to any land shall not be demanded as of right by councils, unless 14 days' notice of intended entry has been given to the occupier of the land, but that, on application to a sheriff, the sheriff may warrant the council to enter that land if he is satisfied that there is a case of urgency. That has been extended slightly in the Bill through a Committee amendment, which allows a justice of the peace to grant the council the power to enter the land. That does not go far enough.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Might it not be the case that the justice of the peace who gives authorisation is a member of the council?

Mr. Chisholm: I thank my hon. Friend for that interesting point, which should be noted by the Minister.

The Bill places a new duty to act to clear watercourses if that would substantially reduce the likelihood of flooding. Blockages of culverts, in particular, can occur very quickly as a result of natural debris, such as broken branches, or irresponsible dumping in watercourses. I have referred to the problems that that can cause councils in pursuing their duties.

There can be no guarantee that a regular maintenance programme would necessarily detect such hazards before a storm or flash flood. On occasions, blocked culverts have rapidly caused significant flooding of property. If councils are to carry out their duty effectively, it is essential for them to be able to access blockages in an emergency, before the flood waters rise to dangerous levels.

For example, in Paisley, which was badly affected by floods in the winter of 1994, a light engineering company called Tercet, which makes high-quality products for the electronics industry, was badly flooded. The flooding arose from a blocked culvert on an adjoining vacant site, which was owned by a private development company, whose whereabouts were not known at the time. Ownership had changed and was initially denied. The flooding rose to a depth of 0.5 m within two hours. The company closed its operations for about six weeks and the damage cost £1.5 million to repair.

Although it is not usual to allow emergency access without a warrant, the speed of flooding and the gravity of the consequences make this an exceptional case. The new clause would allow emergency access without a warrant only if, in the view of the responsible officer, waiting for a warrant would result in significant flooding of property. In those circumstances, the measure is reasonable and necessary. It should be noted that, in paragraph 18 of the original consultation paper, the Government suggested:

"Authorities would be able to carry out work at their own expense with similar access arrangements as obtained in the 1961 Act with the addition of a power to act in an emergency without service of notice."

The Government should explain why their original intentions as embodied in the consultation paper have not taken shape in the Bill.

The simple fact is that, without this emergency access power, there would be a risk of unnecessary flooding occurring in certain cases. I have said that we support and welcome the extra duties for councils conferred by the Bill—indeed, Labour Members pressed for those powers during debates on environment legislation two years ago. However, if councils are to exercise their duties properly, they must have the tools to do the job. One necessary tool is the emergency access power.

[Mr. Chisholm]

The other essential tools, which are not mentioned specifically in an amendment tonight, are the resources to do the job. Hon. Members may raise that issue on Third Reading. There are clearly serious problems, particularly in relation to clause 3, because the plans cannot be realised without funding. Perth has applied for challenge funding, but there are many more applicants than there is money available for the work required.

It is good that councils should have those duties, but they must also have the resources and the powers to perform them properly. Emergency access is an essential power. The councils want it, so why will the Government not grant it to them?

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Madam Deputy Speaker, like me, you have served in the House for a long time. You will remember a time when Tories were toffs. Unfortunately—with the exception of the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who is undoubtedly a toff—they are not toffs any more. They used to know a thing or two about land. However, present Tory Members do not know very much about that issue—although they often sell it in small parcels as estate agents. When they knew about land, they would contribute to debates such as this, and they would have been able to tell us why the new clause is inappropriate.

I do not understand why the Government should resist our new clause, as it seems to be eminently sensible for all the reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) offered. I do not understand why restrictions should be put on local authorities when dealing with emergencies. I do not see why a justice of the peace must be involved. It has always been a great source of irritation to me that I was never made a justice of the peace. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] I did something to offend Willie Ross, which was a grotesque mistake for a young man in politics to make. As I was never a justice of the peace, I do not really know what their powers involve. However, such restrictions amount to impediments that will prevent authorities from taking the proper action at the right time to avoid difficulties.

This House and the other place will go to great lengths to defend landowners. We have discussed defending the lawyers—we can be relied on to do that well—but the defence of land is everything to some hon. Members. I notice that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), will reply to the debate. I hope that he will explain why the new clause is not sound, because it seems to be an eminently sensible idea. The local authority or the three water authorities—the strange creation of the present Administration—are the appropriate bodies in Scotland to deal with such emergencies. I cannot wait to hear the Under-Secretary explain why the new clause is not a good idea.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): The hon. Gentleman should bear it in mind that land is a finite resource and water is not.

6.15 pm

Mr. Hogg: I have always known that the hon. Gentleman is a philosopher. I may not be able to sleep tonight, because I will be thinking about that interesting idea. I shall look for him tomorrow to tell him my thoughts on it.

I believe that we should agree to this reasonable new clause. Goodness knows why the Government always think of reasons why they should not be sensible. I am sure that they will run true to form tonight and resist our new clause. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Leith will not cave in, as he did on a previous occasion. I urge him to press the matter to a Division.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): As many hon. Members will know, my constituency was devastated by floods in 1994. Many people suffered an unbelievably horrific winter: they were forced from their homes, their houses were ruined and their lives were destroyed. Those folk have now returned to their homes, but they continue to fear further flooding. At the time, my constituents did not know who would come to their rescue—they expected some Government help, but this Government certainly did not provide it. It was said at the time that the Government had left them high and dry. Assistance from central Government was certainly a long time in coming.

The local councils did their best. They did not know where the money would come from or how they would deal with the problems created by the floods. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the Minister is listening—he seems to be paying more attention to his hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), who talks with finesse about water.

My constituents had to wait a long time to receive assistance. On one occasion, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) and I visited a family at 1.30 am. We waded through 2.5 ft of stinking sewage which surrounded my constituent's house. Families could not get out and about. The fire service was doing its damnedest to assist people: it was pumping water, but was making little progress as the rain was torrential and the drains were blocked with debris. The Minister must give local authorities real powers and real finance.

Just a week ago, a constituent of mine was going bananas because the river outside her house had nearly reached flood level, and she was imagining what it would be like when the water came over. Madam Deputy Speaker, you are a woman. You can imagine how my constituent felt when she got up and saw sewage all over her house, her carpets and kitchen stinking of bog and human dirt.

The Minister knows about that case, because I have written to him a number of times. I plead with him not to let my constituents suffer that indignity once again. Surely the local authority should be given the power to act quickly in an emergency. However, it takes intensive manpower. Last weekend, dozens of men came out with sandbags. That cost money, but the people who are living in fear of flooding cannot but look to the Government and to local government to give them some security.

I shall finish, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I promised to speak for only five minutes, although I could speak for five hours on this subject. The folk who

get flooded live in my village, in Linwood. I saw them all the time. It broke my heart to see people at Christmas whose toys and everything else for which they had worked had been ruined.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I am interested in the compelling case that the hon. Gentleman is making, but what practical advantage does the new clause give for emergency access to prevent flooding?

Mr. Graham: I am speaking about new clause 1. I ask the Minister to consider the points that I am raising on behalf of my constituents, to ensure that the local authority has meaningful powers so that it can spend money to do the job.

Mr. Bill Walker: That is not what it is about.

Mr. Graham: The hon. Gentleman said something from a sedentary position. If he stands up, I will give way.

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman should read what the amendment is about and what the powers are for. It is not about spending money.

Mr. Graham: I could respond to that, but I have manners. The hon. Gentleman is just being provocative. That man should understand the suffering of my constituents.

I went on record and said that I welcomed the Bill. It is a step in the right direction. I welcome it in every way, and so do my constituents, my local authority and the people who are worried about the threat of flooding. I ask the Minister to go a stage further: give us rock solid assurances so that local government does not need constantly to look over its back, so that it can do the job properly. We are asking for strong emergency powers to deal with the problem. I hope that the Bill will help us in the long term. That is the message that I want the Minister to give my constituents.

I congratulate the Minister on introducing the only decent Bill that I have seen in the past 10 years.

Dr. Godman: May I point out to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you are fortunate in one respect and I am unfortunate in another? My hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) is a neighbour of mine; you just come across him occasionally. *[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) may laugh, but he was being deliberately provocative when he intervened on my hon. Friend's passionate speech.

Talking about provocation, I wish to say mea culpa, that I was not being provocative when I asked my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) a question concerning a justice of the peace in the scheme of things. The JP approached by a local authority may in fact be an elected representative of that authority. My question was prompted by the fact that, most weekends, I meet up with a delightful woman in Scotland who is both a JP and a councillor. Far from criticising Edinburgh—if I can catch my hon. Friend's attention for a moment—I love that city. I lived for 14 years just off the new town.

The new clause is important. A local authority should have the power to take decisive action to defend our constituents where, say, a neighbour—be it a large company or, perhaps, Clyde port authority—is acting irresponsibly. Many people complain about local authorities acting in a cumbersome, bureaucratic way, but in these circumstances, outlined so graphically—I would not say elegantly or even eloquently—by my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde, a local authority has to act promptly. I know of many councillors and local authority officials who would not dream of abusing the powers in the new clause, but decisive action may have to be taken occasionally to deal with some riparian owners, and I refer to Clyde port as a riparian owner.

I am grateful to the Minister for his letter dated 25 February, which was delivered almost by his own fair hand, in which he gave a substantive answer to a serious question that I asked him in Committee. As he said in his letter, he has sent copies to other members of the Committee. There is an important issue here, and with respect to what the Minister says in his letter, a local authority along the Clyde might need to take decisive action against a landowner. When I say "landowner", I am not talking about someone who owns an estate or a farm. We could be talking about an industrial enterprise such as Clyde port. I am not saying for one moment that Clyde port would neglect its obligations to the authorities and the people who live along the Clyde, as my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde and I do. Nevertheless, elected representatives and their officials should have the power to deal with negligent riparian owners or landowners who fail to honour their obligations to their neighbours.

The new clause would strengthen a Bill that will be welcomed by my constituents. Sometimes it is almost impossible to drive through Port Glasgow after heavy rain, as the Minister and the hon. Member for North Tayside know. In other areas in Greenock and Port Glasgow, the water runs heavily off the land. Perhaps Inverclyde council needs to take decisive action. Who can imagine someone like Bailie Tricia Godman behaving ultra vires, behaving badly, if the powers in the new clause were to hand?

We have to trust our local authorities and our much-maligned elected representatives. I know that every hon. Member would rather be a Member of this place than a member of a local council. Members of local councils have many onerous duties. They are much more amenable where their constituents are concerned. We are down here, 400 or 500 miles away from our constituents. Because of the damage that flooding inflicts on people's homes—on their carpets, furniture and so on—a local authority should have the right, through the new clause, to act decisively and expeditiously on behalf of the people in the community.

Mr. Bill Walker: Like the hon. Gentleman, I too have had sad experience of flooding. I do not want the House to debate this matter without my placing it on record that I believe that the record of Harry Robertson and his emergency team in Perth and Kinross is exemplary. They have done a tremendous job, and will continue to do so. It is the officials and not the elected representatives who run the show when things go awry.

6.30 pm

Dr. Godman: I am sure that Harry Robertson and the other officials do a first-class job. The overwhelming majority of local authority officials, from Shetland to the

[Dr. Godman]

borders, do a first-class job in emergencies, as they did during the dreadful disaster in the Dumfries constituency. I was thinking about that the other day when my wife and I drove past Lockerbie. Heaven forbid that such a disaster should happen again—I never want to see it. The everyday problems of flooding have implications for ordinary people who have saved to make beautiful little homes of their houses.

I believe that first-class officials and first-class elected representatives at local level—the Minister may say that I would say that, because I am married to one, but I hope that it will earn me some brownie points—act judiciously in 99.99 per cent. of cases against a negligent and careless neighbour. We have a first-class new clause.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): As I explained in Committee when we debated this issue, I understand the motivation behind the proposal of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm). We also want to allow for quicker access to land, but we do not consider that access without a warrant is necessary or appropriate. That was why the Government tabled an amendment in Committee, which provided for a justice of the peace to sign warrants for access. We consider that to be appropriate and sufficient in the circumstances.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) raised the issue of justices of the peace who are also councillors. So be it. Justices of the peace, on appointment, must swear an oath of allegiance in court to Her Majesty the Queen. They have to swear that they will act independently. There is a distinct separation between their duties as justices of the peace and their duties as councillors.

Dr. Godman: I have great trust in and respect for justices of the peace. In a modest way, their role is analogous to that of a Government Law Officer. As councillors and justices of the peace, they perform two roles, and they do so honourably.

Mr. Kynoch: My point was that there is easy access to justices of the peace, so they are the right people to make access easy. Both in Committee and tonight, the hon. Member for Leith said that, on occasions, blocked culverts have quickly caused significant flooding of property. The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) was not there in the Committee, although he was a member: unfortunately, he was ill at the time and we did not have the benefit of his, I would say, eloquent contribution, even though the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow did not recognise it as such. The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde referred to the misery caused by flooding in his constituency last year.

I want to get on, because we have covered much of that ground in Committee. The hon. Member for Leith referred to Tercet, which is a light engineering company that was affected by the 1994 flooding in Paisley. As with all victims of flooding, it is of great concern to me that that company suffered, as did the constituents of the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde. The Paisley flooding was one of the events that led to the Government's decision to review existing flood prevention legislation.

However, it is fair to say that the floods in Paisley and elsewhere in Scotland in 1994 and 1995 were exceptional. They occurred at a time when some councils were not doing enough to prevent flooding. I am on record as saying that there is evidence that the situation has improved since local government reorganisation. I hope and expect that, when the Bill is enacted, the situation will be further improved.

I accept that there will always be exceptions: no legislation can cover all eventualities. The Bill will make flooding less likely than before. This part of the Bill will ensure swift action using justices of the peace, and I believe that is sufficient.

The hon. Member for Leith referred to the consultation with councils and others on the proposals. It may interest him to know that only 8 per cent. of councils said that they wanted a provision without service of notice. I believe that we have responded to the consultation exercise, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw the motion.

Mr. Chisholm: We welcome the extension of the role to justices of the peace. I do not think that we have had an entirely satisfactory explanation of why the emergency power has not been granted. However, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3

DUTY OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO PUBLISH REPORTS

Mr. Chisholm: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 3, line 2, at end insert—

'Guidelines and consultation

6B. The Scottish Environmental Protection Agency shall publish guidelines as to the content of reports made pursuant to section 6A(2) above; and in preparing any such report the local authority shall consult the Agency.'.

This is an important amendment, because it deals with serious concerns about the Bill. In general, the Bill has been widely welcomed. However, it fails to adopt a catchment area approach, and to deal with the wider environmental implications of flood prevention. There are various ways of taking a more holistic approach to flood prevention. A simple way that was suggested in Committee is to require riparian owners to seek planning permission before undertaking flood defence work that may affect other parts of the river. That is an example of how flood defence work can have knock-on effects.

Another way of achieving a more holistic approach is to have flood appraisal committees, so that councils come together and co-ordinate their activities. That is allowed for under national planning policy guideline 7. We actively encourage and support the formation of such committees, so that local authorities can co-ordinate their work. Beyond that, there is a strong case for an independent body to have a strategic overview of flood control, particularly with reference to the reports about flood control under clause 3.

Two years ago, during the passage of the Environment Act 1995, Labour argued strongly that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency should have such a strategic role, and we continue to hold that view. SEPA's duties are already relevant. Under section 24 of the 1995

Act, it has a consultation role before drainage work is carried out. Under section 25 of that Act, it has a remit to access flood risk. Under section 32, it has general duties in respect of water, such as promoting the conservation of flora and fauna that are dependent on an aquatic environment.

In Committee, the Minister said:

"SEPA has no responsibility for, or specialised knowledge of, watercourse maintenance."—[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 11 February 1997; c. 25.]

SEPA has already produced some best management guidance on flood alleviation works. It has reissued a small document that the previous river boards produced, which warns about the risk of certain flood defence activities. I am told that SEPA has also produced a video on soft engineering flood alleviation techniques, about which I hope to say more shortly.

In its submission to the Scottish Office on the Bill, SEPA highlighted some of those issues. It said:

"The powers given to local authorities under Section 2(1)(a) of the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961 are expanded under Section 3 of the same Act and allow various activities both within and on the banks of a watercourse (removal and deposit of mud, gravel, bush and timber) which might lead to serious pollution of a watercourse or damage to conservation, or other wider interests both within the watercourse and on associated land. We are particularly concerned, for example, about increased aquatic and riverbank herbicide spraying.

We expect the exercise of these powers to be subject to statutory consultation with SEPA . . . It would be appropriate for SEPA . . . to develop and make available guidance on best management practice relating to any works within and alongside watercourses."

Later in the submission, SEPA says that the report referred to in clause 3

"should also record any instances of non-compliance with comments offered as statutory guidance and with any best management practice guidelines provided by SEPA".

The flood defence schemes referred to in clause 3 can clearly have knock-on effects, such as siltation, erosion and acceleration of flow, and can damage not only the watercourse itself but the plant and animal species that depend on it for food and shelter.

"Increasingly"—

according to the World Wide Fund for Nature—

"Scotland's rivers are suffering incremental damage from these activities".

Equally, what happens in the wider catchment area can have profound effects on the river. For example, drainage of forestry land upstream can produce increased run-off, increased land erosion and an increased risk of flooding. All that highlights the need for a strategic overview, a catchment area approach and a role for an environmental organisation such as SEPA.

Flood defence schemes often unnecessarily straitjacket rivers, fill in wetlands or remove islands, damaging rivers and their own ability to absorb flood impact. The so-called soft engineering techniques to which I referred a moment ago can provide long-term flood alleviation, while at the same time enhancing the natural heritage. Such techniques are now widely accepted. I am told that there are now examples at Stenton in central Fife, where wet and dry ponds have been created, and that there is a new pool system near Beattock following motorway developments there. Not much information on such techniques is available, however. It could be provided by SEPA. I look forward to watching the SEPA video in the near future; I have been promised a copy, and I am told that it covers not only some of the examples that I have given, but other examples from Europe and America.

The point is that we must have the benefit of expertise in regard to the broad issue, as well as narrow specifics such as the effects of spraying and dredging river banks and upsetting buffer zones between agricultural land and the river. There must be an holistic approach that takes account of the wider ecology, which means that SEPA must be involved in terms of both being consulted and giving guidance. As I said at the outset, we want co-ordination among local authorities, and we welcome the establishment of the flood appraisal committees; but, beyond that, there must be a role for SEPA. It must be able to provide an environmental overview, and to ensure that an holistic approach to flood prevention is adopted.

Dr. Godman: If the Minister refuses to accept the amendment, will he assure us that the Scottish Office will provide guidelines for our local authorities? As he may recall, I spoke of the difficulties that some smaller authorities may have in producing reports. We seek expert guidance, enabling even the smallest authority to act in a realistic, purposeful way when dealing with the problems that have been outlined so often during the Bill's passage.

6.45 pm

Does the Minister agree that, if he accepted the amendment, the Bill as amended would not place an onerous burden on SEPA's officials? Indeed, I think that those officials might well be pleased to undertake such a task on behalf of local authorities. As I said earlier, I have every confidence in both the elected representatives and the officials of Inverclyde council, but I am sure that they would welcome guidelines issued by SEPA or, if that was not possible, by experts commissioned by the Scottish Office. Perhaps the Minister will be able to tell us proudly that the Scottish Office has such experts in its own ranks, and that it can produce the guidelines.

Problems such as this occur from time to time in constituencies such as mine and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham). If the Minister is going to reject the amendment, I appeal to him at least to give local authorities such as Inverclyde an assurance that guidelines will be issued, as the amendment requires,

"as to the content of reports made pursuant to section 6A(2) above".

The principle of the amendment is essential—that authorities, large and small, should be helped to deal with these troublesome matters as realistically, effectively and efficiently as possible.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): The Forth and Clyde canal is an important facility in my constituency. As the Minister knows, the millennium fund has come up with a large sum for its improvement. We want to know how far the provisions of clause 3 would relate to the canal, and whether there could ever be any difficulty in future in regard to who was funding what. If the Minister cannot answer tonight, I should be glad if he wrote to me later.

Mr. Kynoch: An amendment along similar lines was tabled in Committee, this time by the hon. Member for

[Mr. Kynoch]

Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith). It was one of three amendments proposed by the Opposition, which sought to involve SEPA in flood prevention activities. As I explained then, the Government feel that it is best for councils to deal with the matters involved in the Bill. Councils will be able to determine, on the basis of local circumstances and priorities, what should go into reports.

SEPA is not a flood prevention agent. Its main role is to deal with pollution matters, although it will also advise councils on flooding risk. That said, I also explained in Committee that we are interested in reviewing from time to time whether new developments are reflected in existing policies and objectives. In that connection, I said that we expected the publication soon of a European Commission proposal for a water resources framework directive. It would be premature to anticipate the content of the directive and the implications for catchment management, but we offered to reconsider how that might impact on flood prevention activities, including consultation between interested parties. However, our view is that we should do that outwith consideration of the Bill. Meanwhile, as I further explained in Committee, there is the continuing possibility of voluntary arrangements, and I remain confident that councils, along with SEPA and Scottish Natural Heritage, will approach those issues in a spirit of co-operation.

I hope that the House will accept the assurance that I gave in Committee, that I do not oppose the principle of effective, wider communication on the subject, but in the context of the continuing discussions on this and related matters, it would be premature to act at this stage.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) referred to communication from the Scottish Office. As with all new legislation affecting the powers or duties of local authorities, the Scottish Office will issue a circular as soon as possible after Royal Assent, explaining the main provisions of the Act. Obviously, that will include reports.

Therefore, on the understanding that the Government are prepared to consider the principle of the matter in drawing up any future legislation, I ask the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Chisholm: As the Minister pointed out, there was a similar amendment in Committee, but, first, it was not pressed to a vote and, secondly, it was not identical. That amendment, which was supported by my hon. Friends the Members for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), did indeed refer to consultation, but there was no amendment in Committee about guidelines with reference to the reports in clause 3, so amendment No. 1 builds considerably on the amendment in Committee.

The Minister repeated his claim that SEPA has no remit in that area, but all the evidence that I gave from the Environment Act 1995 and from SEPA's submission to the Scottish Office showed that that is simply not true. SEPA has the expertise on the environment rather than councils and, in saying that, I make no criticism of councils. We welcome the Minister's undertaking that he will consider the matter in principle in future, and we welcome the new duties for councils, but there is a gaping hole in the Bill, because there is no catchment area approach, there is no holistic approach and no account is taken of the environmental implications of flood defence works. Because the environmental principle is so important for Labour Members, we shall press the amendment to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 174, Noes 223.

Division No. 85] **[6.52 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Austin–Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie (Blyth V)
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Dr Lynne *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri

Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Oiner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Thomas McAvoy and Mr. Eric Clarke.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and Mr. Richard Ottaway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—[*Mr. Kynoch.*]

7.6 pm

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): I agree with hon. Members who have said that there is little in the Bill to criticise. As it stands, it imposes duties to assess watercourses, publish reports and so on, and that is worth while.

I should like to mention some studies that have been carried out in Perthshire in the past couple of years. There has been a River Tay catchment study and rural communities flood studies at Bankfoot; at Bridge of Earn; at Milnathort; at Comrie-Dalginross; at Auchterarder; at Aberfeldy; and at Birnam. There have been flood studies on the benefits and costs of flood defences at Aberfeldy and Birnam, which were separate from the two individual studies, and there was a study on the benefits and costs of flood defences at Almondbank.

Those studies were all carried out between 1994 and 1996 and they related only to the rural part of Perthshire. The list does not include the detailed work on the Perth flood prevention scheme, about which the Minister knows a fair amount. The floods in Perth in 1993 were most spectacular in the city, but the rural areas were also flooded, and it is those areas that I should like to speak about. People live in fear of further floods. All the coverage and publicity is of the most spectacular images, and they are to be found in the built-up urban areas. However, sometimes the rural areas suffer just as much, but do not get the same coverage.

I was in Comrie on Wednesday night, when parts of it were flooded. Roads were closed and I was wearing wellington boots as I looked at homes that had been flooded. That was a small flood and was unlikely to attract the cameras, but it was important for those who were affected. I spoke to people in Bridge of Earn on Saturday. During the week, they had anxiously watched the river rising because they had been badly flooded early in the big flood, and they were worried because it looked as if they would be flooded again, especially when they heard the news from Comrie.

On Saturday, people in Comrie had words of praise for Perth and Kinross council's response, and they said that many changes had been made since the flood. During the week, they certainly did not have any criticism of the response to the imminent threat. However, they want more than a response—they want prevention. When rain has fallen for more than an hour, they do not want to have constantly to look out of their windows and worry whether it will be another occasion on which they are flooded. The people of Comrie were flooded very badly. I saw a home video that had been made in the previous bad flood. They have a very anxious time when rain falls heavily and the rivers rise. They worry that there will be another such flood, and they cannot understand why prevention work has not been done.

Perth and Kinross council—in both its previous and its current incarnation—has not shirked its duty on reports. When speaking to new clause 1, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) mentioned that one or two hon. Members might like to talk about the issue of finances. I am one of those hon. Members. The council in my area has not shirked its duty on reports, even when that duty had not been imposed on it by legislation.

Mr. Kynoch: The simple answer to the hon. Lady's question on why the measures have not started is that there are still two objections. I am very surprised that she is not aware of that. My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), who is ardently in support of speedy action in such matters, is certainly well aware of the objections. This afternoon, he spoke to both my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and myself on that very subject.

Ms Cunningham: I appreciate that comments are being made. Unfortunately, however, when one speaks to constituents, they simply do not understand why the work cannot be done. The delay cannot go on indefinitely. We are not short of reports showing the work that needs to be done; we are short of the financial resources that are required to do the work.

Mr. Bill Walker *rose—*

Ms Cunningham: The Minister knows that Perth and Kinross council has been able to place the Perth flood prevention scheme under the challenge fund. The sums required for the scheme are so great that it cannot be funded by the capital allocation. As he knows, rural schemes do not come under it. In this debate, I am talking specifically about rural schemes—about such areas as Bridge of Earn, Comrie and others. About £1 million-worth of work is required. Under current legislation, it is possible to obtain grants from central Government to finance such work, and the grants would be about 50 per cent. of eligible scheme costs. However, in the years indicated, councils would be required to fund the remaining costs from the block capital allocation, which would require section 94 borrowing consent.

One of the difficulties is that we cannot allow the Perth scheme to proceed unless the rural works are done first. If the scheme proceeds without completion of the rural works, the effect on places such as Bridge of Earn will be even worse. Will the Minister reassure the council and my constituents that borrowing consent will be forthcoming for those rural works?

Mr. Kynoch: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way once again. Very briefly, no scheme has yet been submitted for the rural areas. Until such a scheme is submitted, my officials in the Scottish Office clearly cannot consider it. She should know that I have been full of praise for Perth and Kinross council and its predecessor, for the work that they have done so far in developing schemes. I am disappointed that she seems to take the attitude that she does towards measures that are intended to try to help both her constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside. He at least realises that such things must be done properly, and that there is no half-measure.

7.12 pm

Mr. Bill Walker: I shall be very brief. I should first like to thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister for meeting me earlier today. That meeting was a follow-up to others that we have had on the same matter. I should tell the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) that the Secretary of State was very sympathetic to the case that I made. I only wish that some of the councillors were not quite so keen to jump into the public debate on the matter, because I believe that the work record that we have achieved together is worth noting. I should also like to say again that all those involved have the highest respect for Harry Robertson and his team.

As the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross should have known and probably does know, the scheme for rural Perthshire is incomplete. That is what I am concerned about. The damage sustained in the upper reaches of the River Tay when it breaks its banks is horrendous. I have been discussing that aspect, the challenge fund requirements and other matters. All I can tell the hon. Lady is that, like her, I want things to happen. Unlike her, however, I think that I have been attacking the matter in a structured and organised way. I believe that the results that I have achieved in the past could well be repeated.

7.14 pm

Dr. Godman: I shall speak for even less time than the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), and I shall stay away from the situation in Perthshire—that beautiful county where my wife and I have spent so many happy holidays, particularly in Kenmore, where the fishing is good. If the Bill improves matters for our constituents who suffer flooding to any extent, obviously it must be welcomed by both sides of the House.

In response to a comment made earlier in the debate by the hon. Member for North Tayside, I should like to say that I am utterly confident that, with this legislation, Councillor Harry Mulholland, leader of Inverclyde council, his fellow councillors and officials will act expeditiously in dealing with such problems. I was pleased that the Minister, when I asked him about guidelines, promised a circular. Matters will be improved for our constituents if such advice is forthcoming to Inverclyde and other councils—heaven knows, they deserve no less. There is nothing worse than a flooded house, with treasured possessions ruined. My local council—Harry Mulholland and his team, officials and elected representatives—will be able to use the legislation to improve matters for people in the communities across Inverclyde.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

PROFESSIONS SUPPLEMENTARY TO MEDICINE

That the draft Professions Supplementary to Medicine (Arts Therapists Board) Order of Council 1997, which was laid before this House on 6th February, be approved.

LEGAL AID AND ADVICE (SCOTLAND)

That the draft Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 7th February, be approved.

That the draft Civil Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 7th February, be approved.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14A(1) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

BETTING LICENSING

That the draft Deregulation (Betting Licensing) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

Drug Abuse Resistance Education (Nottinghamshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

7.17 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I have initiated this debate to request that the Government help to extend Nottinghamshire's highly successful DARE—drug abuse resistance education—scheme across the United Kingdom. Nottinghamshire pioneered the scheme, and it should be extended, because it has been such a success and because it is helping young people to say no to drugs.

Any disappointment that I might have because the Government's reply will not be made by the Lord President of the Council—who is meant to co-ordinate the Government's anti-drug strategy—is more than made good by my pleasure in learning that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment will reply. She has established a reputation as a fierce advocate of anti-drugs activity. Moreover, but for her generosity and accessibility, I could not have prepared for the debate as constructively as I hope I have. I also pay tribute to her civil servants, who were extremely helpful in answering one or two of the most important questions ahead of the debate.

The drug problem in the United Kingdom is one of the worst problems afflicting our society. It registers very high in everyone's concerns, and in all the polls. All parents care very much about the issue, and they want something to be done about it. The DARE programme provides a clear and effective way in which to tackle the problem.

I shall not spend a lot of time on the detail of the project, but, in a nutshell, a police officer visits a school weekly for 17 weeks and talks, acts out role plays, and has fun with the nine-year-olds to educate them in the risks of drug taking, giving them the knowledge and skills to resist those who would push drugs at them. It makes the children more confident, and has a massive positive effect, which is difficult to quantify, on the rest of their education.

Having seen the joy and enthusiasm that the scheme generates among the kids, the police, the teachers and the parents, I can honestly say—even having been in politics for some years and having perhaps grown quite cynical about many things, particularly those that we come across in this place—that I have never been more inspired by anything during my years in politics than I have by the enthusiasm and keenness of everyone from the police officers to the nine-year-olds who get so involved in the anti-drugs campaign.

A vast team of people work to make DARE happen in Nottinghamshire: the infectiously enthusiastic Police Inspector David Scott; WPC Diane Curly and Geoff Stafford, the first of Nottinghamshire's DARE officers; the many teachers who give their time, some of whom I met recently at Brocklewood school in my constituency, where I first saw DARE in action; and the local councillors who are committed to the project—Councillor Sue Scott was the first to point out the project to me.

The list continues, with officers from the United States who flew in to help train the first British police authority to operate a DARE project. There are seven officers from different American forces in the United Kingdom today. Phillip Ridyard has done a great deal of voluntary fund raising and publicity work. Dozens of local businesses throughout Nottinghamshire deserve credit for their role. Colin Bailey, the chief constable of Nottinghamshire, had the courage to back his judgment and his officers in this bold initiative.

Above all, we should remember the children, whose confidence grew before my eyes as I sat at the back of a classroom while they were going through their paces with the local bobby. DARE is an unalloyed good thing. National Government must now take another step to give it the boost it deserves and the clout it needs.

Every nine-year-old in Nottinghamshire participates in the DARE programme. That includes 342 schools, 700 classes and 15,000 kids. The impact has been terrific. It is said that cautions to young offenders have been slashed by half in Mansfield, where the first pilot project has been running since 1993. I hope that the Minister will be able to press for more thorough research, so that we can quantify the benefits of the project.

Everybody knows that DARE works, but it is easier for hard-pressed chief constables and head teachers to target their limited and valuable resources if they can present hard statistical evidence to their paymasters. I hope that the Minister will consider the possibility of the Department's research programme statistically underpinning the good effects of the DARE programme.

The idea was piloted in Los Angeles in 1983, and was quickly adopted throughout the United States of America. It is now compulsory in all elementary schools. Federal funds were invested in its start-up year, and the programme was then taken up by local government, giving each scheme its own flavour. Television stations helped by showing anti-drugs cartoons, and all manner of celebrities and companies aligned themselves with it. Presidents signed up to it in the United States. I entertain hopes that perhaps princes will do so in the United Kingdom. The DARE logo is displayed on "Power Rangers" and "Baywatch" merchandise. The kids see it reflected in many of the sports, activities and entertainments that they participate in.

Fifteen years later, DARE is still spreading in America, and has been adopted in 41 other countries. A long-term evaluation to consider its progress over 10 years was commissioned in 1986, showing a 65 per cent. reduction in drug experimentation and misuse among children who finished school and went into employment. DARE in the United Kingdom is franchised from America to the trustees, based in Nottinghamshire, and has developed practical methods to teach a generation of children how to say no to drugs.

The programme is aimed at children between nine and 13, and is taught in the classroom by a DARE-trained police officer for one hour a week over 17 weeks. Lessons focus sharply on the development of personal skills and the strategies that young people need to resist the increasing pressures on them to experiment with drugs. There is nothing quite like seeing the local bobby, tunic off and sleeves rolled up, playing and having great fun with nine-year-olds, communicating with them and participating in the development of their awareness of the many ways of saying no to drugs, drink and cigarettes.

Seeing the programme in action is exciting, but it is not enough to see it in action just in Nottinghamshire—we need to see it in action throughout the United Kingdom. I hope that I sound relatively enthusiastic about the programme.

The Minister would be welcome to visit Nottinghamshire and see a DARE class at first hand. I shall take the liberty of asking the chief constable to invite her. During the next two weeks would be a good time for her to go, because seven policemen from seven different United States forces are currently over here working closely with the Nottinghamshire constabulary, training police officers from West Yorkshire—which covers 61 classes and 2,000 kids—and the City of London police force, where today, I believe, the Sir John Cass school became the first DARE school in London. The next group to be trained in Nottinghamshire could include officers from the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Metropolitan police and the Merseyside police.

DARE is part of the development of rounded human beings. It could therefore fit smoothly into the national curriculum and its programme of personal and social education, particularly as targeted on primary schools. I understand that the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority is looking at the life skills and personal development in the national curriculum and will present its report to the Secretary of State. I hope that the Minister has made or will make representations to the authority on drug awareness aspects of the programme.

DARE gives pupils facts about the harmful effects of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. It emphasises the benefits of a healthy life style, and teaches young people to make informed and responsible choices. They then make the decision to say no. That is far more important than any number of lectures and slide presentations, giving children the confidence, the nerve and occasionally the courage to resist when some in their peer group—their fellow pupils, for example—are making lots of different and ingenious offers to get them started on the road of smoking, drinking or drug abuse. Children carry that personal inoculation with them, as many of us did from our parents, by drawing in those values and making their own assessment. That is the best inoculation, and that is what DARE provides.

Parents, who in many areas feel anguished and powerless about the threats that drugs pose to their children, are very involved in the programme in Nottinghamshire. They feel that it is for them, as well as for their youngsters. They are involved in the meetings with teachers and with the DARE police officers. They are involved right up to the graduation ceremony, at which children perform plays, poems and songs that they have written from their experience through the DARE programme. At the end of the 17-week process, it is not just back to school. There is a prize giving, so that children have not only a certificate, but a sense of achievement that will encourage them to respect and look after what they have achieved in those 17 weeks, which will live with them for the rest of their lives.

The publicity that DARE has generated means that the message has reached a wider community through press coverage and the media. I pay particular tribute to Blue Peter and other television and radio programmes. DARE has been successfully piloted in Nottinghamshire for three years, with the backing of the police, local authorities, hundreds of local businesses, parents, school governors and national companies. It is a registered charity, with nine trustees and 350 members. We all owe those trustees and members a massive "thank you" for being unpaid volunteers, creating and sustaining the initiative.

In addition, the chief constable in Nottinghamshire has committed 24 constables and one inspector to the project full time. More than 15,000 nine-year-olds—the entire year group in Nottinghamshire—will move on to their senior schools in the summer with self-confidence, high esteem, pride, values and morality that will allow them confidently to walk away from most of the pressures—particularly the inevitable offer of drugs—that sadly are part and parcel of young people's lives today. It was never so in my school days, but it is now part and parcel of the experience of young people in schools to be offered drugs. They need the protection and the assertiveness that DARE provides to enable them to say no when faced with peer pressure.

In order to assess the success of DARE, North Nottinghamshire Health Promotion was commissioned to evaluate the short-term effects on children of the pilot programme. Its two-year evaluation is due to be published in March, and I understand that it is most complimentary. It shows that, after children have completed the DARE lessons, they know at least one practical way of saying no to drugs, they identify cigarettes and alcohol as drugs, they know that drugs can be harmful and that drink-driving is illegal, and they understand the difference between prescribed drugs and harmful ones.

The report also concluded that the whole-community approach had many benefits for individual organisations involved and for the children, and played a significant part in the success of the project. The report is a ringing endorsement of the DARE project.

The effectiveness of DARE has also been noted in individual Office for Standards in Education reports that comment on the positive contribution it has made to pupils' welfare and guidance. The lessons are there to be learned. The Ofsted report on drug education in schools throughout the United Kingdom is to be published in the near future, and I very much hope that, when the Minister has had a chance to digest the report, she will drop me a line with her considered view on whether DARE can be applied nationwide. I am very grateful that the Lord President of the Council has found time to listen to the debate.

The DARE project in Nottinghamshire has been an outstanding success by every possible measure. The Government—of whatever political complexion; this is a non-partisan debate—should consider whether the experiment can be applied further afield. The inoculation of the DARE programme works. DARE has clearly harnessed an incredible amount of energy and imagination from local communities.

All those to whom I have spoken in the police force, the Prince's Trust, the local education authorities, the county council and local schools are united in agreeing that its benefit could be expanded nationwide. All those who have personally seen DARE in action, from the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the Home Secretary and their shadows, all commend DARE.

There has been enough commending: let us start promoting. What can we do at national level? There are many opportunities for the Minister to enhance DARE's already high reputation. Action on even one of the seven points that I shall raise would certainly help.

[Mr. Graham Allen]

First, it would be great for morale if the work in Nottinghamshire of the DARE trustees and members of the charity were recognised and commended in the House. DARE needs ministerial support, particularly from the Department for Education and Employment, to promote it within schools throughout the nation. Perhaps the Minister will consider issuing a guidance note to local authorities to help spread best practice and facilitate matters for local education authorities that want to pick up DARE.

I was a little disappointed by the Minister's response to my parliamentary question in October, when she said:

"No estimates of requiring the DARE programme to be implemented nationwide have been made . . . it is for the individual schools to decide".—[*Official Report*, 28 October 1996; Vol. 284, c. *35*.]

Of course it is, and there are a number of good schemes around. But surely, on such a vital issue as anti-drugs strategy, we need to make up our minds which programme is the most effective and works best. We should make it clear as part of the national curriculum. We should be prescriptive, as every day we linger, hundreds of youngsters go astray. Knowing the Minister's deep commitment to the issue, I hope that she will use her influence and weight to press for nothing less.

Secondly, Ministers could seize the political lead and co-ordinate involvement of the Education and Employment Department, the Health Department, the Home Office and the Lord President's Office to extend DARE's success nationwide. As the Lord President is in his place, let me take the opportunity to ask the Minister to table DARE in Nottinghamshire and its success at the Cabinet Sub-Committee on drug misuse which is chaired by the right hon. Gentleman.

"Tackling Drugs Together" should be a strategy for prevention as well as the title of a document. While a "drugs Tsar" may not be necessary, a political figurehead and a champion for DARE at ministerial level certainly is.

Thirdly, as teacher and police time is allocated from existing budgets, and course materials are paid for by local sponsors, costs are very low. However, the Department could promote business involvement in a more systematic way. In Nottinghamshire, local and national businesses provide a DARE pencil, a DARE ruler and a DARE course book. I do not know whether I am allowed to use props, but course books like this one are provided and sponsored by businesses at no cost whatsoever to the council tax payer or to the taxpayer. Every child who graduates from the programme is given a party courtesy of McDonald's, the local bus companies in Nottinghamshire contribute to the transport costs, and the local press have printed a centre spread roll of honour for every graduation. Much more will be necessary if DARE is to go nationwide.

If the scheme goes nationwide, I hope that the Ministers present today will be prepared to take the lead in co-ordinating private sector involvement. For example, perhaps the Minister or her officials could meet the sports shoe company, Converse, and the Prince's Trust, both of which have expressed an interest in supporting the scheme on a wider basis.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I intervene not to pre-empt my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary's speech, but simply to express my appreciation of the way in which the hon. Gentleman is addressing the House on a subject that is important to hon. Members of all parties; and to underline the fact that I very much share his emphasis on improving the effort in schools. I shall carefully examine everything that he has said. I have been putting a considerable effort into encouraging private sector involvement throughout the country in various ways, including the drugs challenge fund, which has proved very successful.

My intervention provides me with an opportunity both to give the hon. Gentleman a pointer and to express my thanks in another direction. One of Nottingham's major economic features is Boots the Chemist. The company has done a great deal, including running its own anti-drugs information weeks in its stores throughout the country. It is a good example of what the hon. Gentleman and I wish to encourage.

Mr. Allen: I am very grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's intervention. I am also pleased to see the Under–Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), in his place.

Tremendous linkage with local business in Nottinghamshire has been one of the features underpinning the project's success. Opportunities are available to cast the net more widely, to make good the very small amount of income necessary to produce the basic materials, such as T-shirts and badges which, through celebrity endorsement, make DARE recognisable to a child, not merely in the classroom but on Saturday morning television when their favourite pop star wears a DARE logo, as has happened in the United States, where, for example, famous basketball players endorse the DARE campaign.

Fourthly, for DARE to spread, we need a core group of DARE-trained police officers seconded either to the Home Office or, if the Home Office cannot or is unwilling to handle it, the Department for Education and Employment, to form a national unit for DARE training and a central resource for best practice in all DARE work. That requires a tiny reallocation of the central budget, but would give the most tremendous signal to chief constables, who would be far more willing to use resources to staff the scheme with local police officers as a result. After all, the commitment by the chief constable of Nottinghamshire, for example, of £650,000 a year for the 24 officers involved in DARE is sizeable.

Another appealing thing about DARE in these stringent financial times is that it does not drain public resources. Apart from the fact that it saves taxpayers millions of pounds in the long run, DARE uses existing resources allied to private sector funding. Having said that, I pay tribute to the £6 million per annum committed by the Minister and her Department to the grants for education support and training scheme and other anti-drug funding, which is very welcome.

Fifthly, an area that falls very clearly within the Department's remit is the need to conduct proper long-term research along the lines of the 10-year evaluation in the United States to assess and continue to improve the effectiveness of DARE. I wrote to Lord Henley about that on 25 June 1996, and he promised an evaluation of one of the anti-drug programmes by the end

of the year. Perhaps the Minister could write to me about the outcome of that evaluation, and comment in broader terms about the Department's research into the effects of DARE.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): The hon. Gentleman might like to know that we will be publishing an evaluation document covering all the GEST projects, including the DARE programme carried out by Kirklees local education authority, which I believe is the one he is discussing. It is not available as I speak but will be shortly, and I shall be very happy to send it to him.

Mr. Allen: I thank the Minister for that very helpful reply. The £65,000 spent on that survey is an incredibly small investment, but will have a tremendous multiplying effect if we can learn the lessons of the Kirklees project and the Nottinghamshire example.

Mrs. Gillan: The figure is £80,000.

Mr. Allen: I stand corrected—£80,000. It is going up as we speak.

Sixthly, how can we take the tremendous work done for nine-year-olds—let us imagine that we can do it nationwide—into secondary schools? People need a refresher. I understand that the key age for a booster to young people's resistance to drug offers would be 15 years old. In Nottinghamshire, the county council is working with the police and health promotion officers to develop such a follow-up. The Department may want to call for papers on that and request that officials discuss how it is going.

Seventhly, I wonder whether the Minister and the Leader of the House—I am delighted that the right hon. Gentleman is present—feel that we should knock some heads together on the budget process that police forces have to go through, which is a serious problem for chief constables. I know that the process is part of the Home Office's empire, but I should like to explain why it has appalling consequences for young people's education and health.

Putting bobbies into the classroom through a DARE project prevents thousands of crimes and saves billions of pounds-worth of drug-related crime. Such prevention means that we do not have to chase the drug abusers, lock them up, put them through the courts, build prisons or pick up the human pieces consequent to drug-related crime. Yet the statistics upon which chief constables' budgets are based and allocated give greater weight to one burglar being caught than all the drug-related crime being prevented, making it more and more difficult for chief constables to allocate resources to drug programmes. That is complete stupidity, and must end.

Many chief constables are eager to experiment with a DARE project but are not able to show on the bottom line that it prevents crime. By definition, since the crime has not occurred, it cannot be quantified. Nottinghamshire's 24 DARE officers would doubtless enable chief constables to say that they had caught X burglars. Such budgeting is therefore counter-productive. I do not want to destroy the way in which the police account for their activities, but I hope that the Minister will be able to take that point away and discuss it with her colleagues and the chief constables, so that we can arrive at a prevention strategy.

Eighthly, I would like the Minister to use her muscle and authority to end the nonsense of the misuse of the Drug Trafficking Act 1994. I shall explain how. The drug confiscation fund, with which I know the Leader of the House is very familiar, is made up of the proceeds of drug crime, which is a good idea. That fund can be used for drug-related policing—so far, so good—but I understand that the Home Office's interpretation of such policing relates only to enforcement not prevention. I understand that that is an interpretation of the statute, not a requirement of it.

I therefore very much hope that, if the Home Office cannot see that money spent on prevention yields many more times its value than chasing the symptoms, the fund will be made available to other Departments—perhaps the DFEE—or some other distribution body.

It is perfectly sane, indeed quite ironic, to take money from the drug barons—their ill-gotten gains that they have squeezed out of our young people—and turn it against them by educating young people, so that the drug barons' market is not provided in future. I hope that that very nice irony appeals to hon. Members on both sides of the House.

It is not acceptable for Members of Parliament, Ministers and shadow Ministers to wring their hands and whinge about how difficult and intractable the problems are; that is not an acceptable posture for anybody in Parliament or the Executive.

DARE proves that the problem is tractable if we have the political will to tackle it. The evil of drug abuse must be tackled seriously. Removing its market—uneducated young people—is the biggest contribution we can make. If we merely pursued the consequences, it would be nothing short of a dereliction of duty, as we have it in our power easily and cheaply to inoculate our youngsters against this evil infection.

DARE in Nottinghamshire shows the way, and the effort must go nationwide. I know that the Minister, along with the Lord President, can give real leadership to DARE. If she does so, she will inspire even more teachers, police officers, parents and children in their fight against drugs. I wish her well in that.

7.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on his success in the ballot. I am pleased that he has chosen to raise an issue of such importance to the Government and to the country.

I was delighted that my right hon. Friend the Lord President could be present for most of the debate, as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), who, as Nottingham's sponsor Minister, has taken a close interest in the drugs prevention programme in Nottingham; I believe that the DARE—drug abuse resistance education—project visited by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was in his constituency.

I also thank the hon. Member for Nottingham, North for his kind remarks, and especially for his invitation to visit the DARE project in Nottinghamshire. Sadly, he will know that I cannot give a commitment, but I shall look as sympathetically as possible at any invitation that may arrive on my desk, and, if at all possible, take it up. He will understand that that will probably be impossible in the coming two weeks.

[Mrs. Cheryl Gillan]

We all know, from the familiar names of individual tragedies, that preventing drug misuse and protecting our young people from drugs cannot be anything but a national priority. As the hon. Gentleman has so recently become a father—he and both mother and child have my very good wishes and congratulations—he is doubtless more aware of the problem than most.

Before I deal with the Nottingham DARE project and the hon. Gentleman's comments, I want to offer a little background on the Government's overall approach to drug prevention. I hope that that will cast some light on some of his specific points and demonstrate that much action is already in hand.

"Tackling Drugs Together", the Government's three-year strategy for combating drug misuse, puts new emphasis on preventing young people from taking drugs. On the prevention front, it brings together the resources of the Home Office, the Department of Health and my Department in a concerted effort to prevent young people from being drawn into the world of drugs. Therefore, the whole ethos of the White Paper is to put a new emphasis on education and prevention, to reduce both the availability and acceptability of drugs to young people.

The great value of the strategy is that it has set up a mechanism to ensure that the title of the White Paper, "Tackling Drugs Together", is followed through in practice. We lay great stress on the value of co-ordinated action under the leadership of the Lord President and his Cabinet Sub-Committee on drugs, as well as the officials in his central drugs co-ordination unit.

Colleagues in the Department of Health oversee a £5 million-a-year campaign to alert young people to the risks of taking drugs and to inform parents about the effects and dangers. The campaign has recently targeted Ecstasy, LSD and speed in radio and magazine advertisements. It has also produced a booklet, "A Parent's Guide to Drugs and Solvents", which was launched by the Prime Minister last May. In less than a year, 1.7 million copies of the booklet have been distributed, equipping millions of parents with the facts. The Department of Health also supports the national drugs helpline; in the two years since it has been operating, it has answered more than 500,000 calls.

The Home Office central drugs prevention unit supervises the operation of a series of local and regional projects through its 12 drug prevention initiative teams, which show what effective drug prevention action local people can take in partnership with others in the community. All DPI projects are fully evaluated and the resulting good practice is made available nationally. That research will help to inform future programmes of drug prevention work in line with the hon. Gentleman's expectations. The east midlands team, which includes Nottingham, works closely with local agencies to develop those aims, including a project to devise culturally appropriate drug prevention materials within schools; I consider that particularly important.

My Department has made available £6 million in each year of the strategy to enable local education authorities to train teachers and to develop innovative approaches to drugs education. Those projects have been evaluated and we shall publish a document summarising the findings of the reports.

We shall also have the reports from the Office for Standards in Education on drug education in schools and on the contribution of the youth service. Ofsted has found that, in response to guidance issued by the Department to schools in May 1995, around a third of primary schools and three quarters of secondary schools have introduced policies for drugs education and for dealing with drug-related incidents.

All those documents, I am pleased to say, will be published on Monday. They will be distributed widely to professionals and made available free of charge to schools. I hope that the booklet will provide a useful pointer to those seeking to develop drugs education programmes as to the range of options that exist. We shall also look terribly carefully at the conclusions of the Ofsted report to see how we might build on our existing work programme in the coming 12 months of the "Tackling Drugs Together" strategy and beyond.

That clearly demonstrates that schools share our concern to ensure that the issue of drugs is not ignored. They have not shirked their responsibility to address what is a sensitive educational issue. Schools have a clear role to play and the evidence shows that they are playing it with increasing conviction.

One way in which schools often choose to tackle the issue is through the involvement of outside professionals in the classroom. When conducted in a reasonable way, complementing existing provision, such partnerships epitomise the spirit of the White Paper, which places great stress on the need for close co-operation.

The DARE scheme in Nottinghamshire is a worthy example of such partnership. Bringing together all elements of the community, and especially schools and the police, its benefits can go much wider than the vital focus of drug prevention. I have been impressed by all that the hon. Member for Nottingham, North has had to say in praising the scheme in Nottinghamshire and I shall take careful note of his words. The scheme promises better relationships with the police, improved self-esteem and healthier decisions by our young people. Above all, it promises to make a significant impact on drug misuse in the east midlands.

I know that the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary were suitably impressed on their visits to the scheme. I am pleased to be able to take this opportunity to applaud the valuable work of the DARE trustees in Nottinghamshire. Other police forces and local education authorities will no doubt want to look closely at the emerging results of the Nottinghamshire programme as they consider whether DARE has a contribution to make in their work.

Local needs and circumstances will always, quite rightly, determine the best course in any particular area, but I am pleased that the agencies in Nottinghamshire have been able to agree a way forward that they consider meets the needs of Nottinghamshire and its pupils.

I am especially pleased to note the widespread involvement in DARE of private business. I was grateful to my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council for his intervention on that point. That involvement demonstrates that the problems associated with drugs affect all of society. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North was quite right to pay tribute to the role of the private sector. My Department fosters private sector input in a number of drug education programmes. McDonald's

is one such firm, and it complements its contribution to DARE by funding a drugs training programme for governors jointly with the Department for Education and Employment. I have myself been closely involved in a current drug prevention initiative sponsored by Iceland Foods.

My right hon. Friend the Lord President has confirmed his interest in attracting private sector support. His drugs challenge fund, which matches Government funding to private sector finance raised by local drug action teams, is a prime example of the efforts we are making.

Mr. Allen: The private sector has done tremendous work raising money to assist the development of the materials necessary to spread the word. However, I am sure that the Minister is aware that we would enter a quantitatively different ball game if we were to extend DARE to 42 counties and many more police forces. The effort of co-ordination needed compared to the current level would be like comparing collecting money with a tin can to a highly organised, systematic fund-raising strategy. I hope that the Minister will take away from the debate tonight the need for some real muscle to be put behind fund raising by the private sector by the Government nationally.

Mrs. Gillan: I shall take away a lot from the debate. I have been very pleased by the success of the drugs challenge fund. In the first year, it successfully raised more than £1 million from the private sector for local drug prevention initiatives. I note the hon. Gentleman's point and I shall draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Lord President.

This evening, we have talked a lot about the DARE approach, but there is no one simple or magical answer to drug prevention. There are other approaches. Other professionals will have a contribution to make in the delivery of drug education. Schools can choose from a range of materials. While I know that guidance from my Department, not least on ensuring the helpful contribution of outside agencies and on selecting materials, has assisted schools in those choices, it is quite right that schools must have those choices. Beyond the requirements of the national curriculum, which lays down what must be taught about drugs at each key stage, schools must look at their own needs and circumstances to determine what will be best for them. I noted the hon. Gentleman's comments about potential changes to the national curriculum, but he will be aware that there is a moratorium on altering it until 2000.

The Government have provided leadership. They are taking a responsible approach to ensuring that the needs of all our pupils are appropriately addressed. That applies equally to the police and, quite rightly, it is for chief officers to determine the approach of their forces in light of local needs and priorities.

Drug education is an area where schools may, initially, feel a little lost. Teachers may not feel confident in dealing with a subject about which they know very little, and whose jargon and subject matter can change rapidly. It is all too tempting for schools to learn to rely on other agencies to deliver their drug education for them. As I have said, schools have, generally, grasped the nettle of drug education and been prepared to overcome their fears and sensitivities to give it the attention it deserves, but leaning too heavily on others will not help our young people. Even in schools enjoying the support of programmes such as DARE, drug education must have a place in the curriculum before officers visit, and again after the programme is completed.

Mr. Allen *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Gillan: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman agrees. So long as that message is recognised, and outside involvement is acknowledged to be a strong sharing of responsibility and not an abdication of responsibility, such partnerships can be a powerful force for good. I am full of praise for the contribution that the police forces in England are making to education in their areas. Alongside the pioneering Nottinghamshire force and its use of the DARE approach, police forces in Derbyshire, Hampshire and Staffordshire, among others, are working with schools on other comprehensive drug education schemes, such as "Getting It Right".

Elsewhere, police forces have produced policy documents and materials for use in schools. There is much evidence of the commitment that the police show to effective drug prevention work in our schools. It is a partnership that, at every level, can have only positive benefits. As the recent inspection of force drug strategies by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary noted:

"Police forces have responded with commitment and enthusiasm to drug prevention and education in schools, in consultation with local education authorities."

Mr. Allen: Although the word drug appears in the title of DARE, the programme is not only, or even mainly, about drugs. It is about giving young people the ability, as well-rounded and educated young people, to make decisions and choices, instead of having those decisions and choices forced on them. That is what DARE brings to the equation and its approach is applicable to drugs, drink and cigarette smoking. It is also applicable to many other areas, and it is an important part of the social education of young people. It is worth repeating that DARE's impact goes well beyond its effect on the drug culture. It helps to develop human beings who are capable of interacting with other people rationally and productively.

The head teacher of my local school has told me about young people in the class that was taken by the local bobby. Before, their ability to communicate, even with children in their class, had atrophied. They were not stimulated at home, but they were stimulated by the police officer so that they started to interact with others in their class and to develop a wider range of social skills. That is a wonderful example of the work of DARE.

Mrs. Gillan: I am prepared to let an intervention continue for a long time when it is so agreeable. The hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm is a joy to see, and I share it.

The inspectorate of constabulary continued:

"Many varied approaches have been adopted, reflecting the needs of differing communities and environments".

It was noticed how well police forces had responded.

The hon. Gentleman made several points about police budgets and the distribution of resources confiscated from drug traffickers. The Home Secretary has provided an extra £20 million in 1996-97 for 1,000 more police

[Mrs. Gillan]

officers and a further £40 million in the coming financial year for 2,000 more officers, but it rightly remains for chief officers to decide how to allocate their resources. I make no apology for the fact that strong enforcement measures remain a key element of our strategy. Nevertheless, I was interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments and I am prepared to pass them on to Home Office Ministers. My right hon. Friend the Lord President listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman had to say. We are, after all, pursuing the same ultimate goal.

DARE, in common with other approaches to drug education, aims to equip our young people with the skills to make informed, healthy choices. Ultimately, all the efforts expended on drug prevention and education depend on individuals and the choices that each of us makes. It goes further than health education; it centres around young people's personal and social development. We shall consider carefully all those matters when the School Curriculum Assessment Authority presents its replies to the Secretary of State shortly.

Mr. Allen: The Minister has been very positive in replying to the debate. Governments do what they can, regardless of party, but the ball is in the court of those outside this place who read the debate and who care about tackling drugs. Be they chief constables, parents, teachers or even children, if they happen to read the debate in *Hansard*, I hope that they seize the opportunities offered by the Minister to move forward on the DARE agenda. I am grateful for your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker and that of the Minister. The debate must not end here. The people who care about the initiative must help the Minister and the Lord President of the Council to ensure that we join together, regardless of party, to attack the evil of drugs.

Mrs. Gillan: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is not simply about personally rejecting drugs but about not turning a blind eye, not casually accepting drugs as someone else's problem or some other family's tragedy. It is about making it plain, whatever the short-term high and whatever the style gurus say, that drugs are damaging to the individual, the family, the community and the country. It is about confronting drug misuse and making it clear that it is not tolerable and not worth it. It is about explaining rationally not only the risks that the individual misuser is toying with, but their wider social impact. They feed local crime and provide a market for greedy opportunists.

Ecstasy misusers may regard their drug taking as a bit of harmless fun, but their decision to take the drug not only places their health at risk but places them at the end of a chain of supply that is inevitably involved in criminality. It is the sum of those individual decisions that nurtures the greed and feeds the misery that drugs bring with them. All the Government's efforts on drugs are focused on defeating that greed. Any other approach is simply the efficient management of moral decline—an approach that the Government will never countenance.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this important subject. I hope that I have replied to him fully. I am comforted that we are in full agreement about the way in which to go about tackling drugs together.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 27 February 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Action for Community Employment

1. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations have been received concerning proposed further reductions in the ACE schemes. [16359]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): Representations have been made to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister by the four Northern Ireland party leaders, and by a number of organisations and individuals directly to my noble Friend Baroness Denton and the Training and Employment Agency. In the 1995 and 1996 public expenditure surveys, resources allocated to ACE were reduced by 25 per cent. and 28 per cent. respectively, with the loss of 2,000 ACE posts each year.

Rev. Martin Smyth: At a time of continuing high unemployment in some parts of Northern Ireland, which are crying out for better training, and at a time when training has been cut in other areas, is it not wrong to cut the ACE scheme, which has provided useful training and helped unemployed people to gain employment? Is the Minister aware that further cuts will bite into the core trainers while also damaging the disabled and elderly in the social community?

Mr. Ancram: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern, but he must be aware that unemployment has fallen considerably in Northern Ireland. We must consider priorities within available resources. Unemployment has fallen from 17.2 per cent. in 1986 to 9.2 per cent. now, and 53,000 people have come off the unemployment register in that time. There are 7,200 unfilled vacancies at the training and employment agency. Long-term unemployment, which is specifically important in this area, has dropped by 17.8 per cent. during the last year.

Against that, we have the priority of the Government's responsibility to provide for the security of the people of Northern Ireland, as we are required to do. We have made it clear that, because of the changed circumstances, we are having to look across the board for £120 million over three years. I think that the people of Northern Ireland would expect the money to be spent on preserving their security, and I feel that we should pay tribute to the security forces and the police for the success that they have achieved recently as a result of that expenditure.

Rev. William McCrea: The ACE scheme has been very important and successful, dealing with long-term unemployment in all parts of Northern Ireland. It has been operating for 16 years and has consistently exceeded the targets set for it. In the light of that, and given that long-term unemployment in Northern Ireland is two to three times higher than it is in Great Britain, why have the Government used the hatchet on the ACE project, to the detriment of our long-term unemployed? Does he accept that the decision is resented throughout Northern Ireland and ought to be changed?

Mr. Ancram: I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the cost of preserving security in Northern Ireland in the face of terrorist activity is a priority. I do not think that he is alone in resenting the fact that the cost of doing that must be borne by other programmes in the Province. That is the message that we should be getting across—that the best way of achieving the results that we want for both the long-term and the short-term unemployed is to bring about peace in the Province, with a growing economy and the creation of more jobs.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Does the Minister agree that penalising education, health and the long-term unemployed on the basis that the Government are discharging their primary function of protecting the lives and property of the citizens of Northern Ireland is entirely wrong and amounts to hostage taking? The Government are saying, "If you do not behave yourselves, or if a small section of you do not behave themselves, we shall punish the most vulnerable members of society as a whole."

Mr. Ancram: I am sorry that the hon. and learned Gentleman takes that attitude. When there was a ceasefire, security requirements were being reduced and money was available as a result, I did not hear him say that we should not spend that money on education, health and employment programmes. In fact, I suspect that he welcomed our actions. The corollary is that, when security requirements are reintroduced as a result of changes in the security situation, everyone must share the pain.

Mr. Illsley: Do not the cuts to the ACE schemes amount to well over 50 per cent., with a loss of 2,000 jobs? Fifty per cent. of the core jobs have also been lost, which threatens some of the ACE schemes and some vitally needed services, despite the overwhelming success of the ACE schemes and the overwhelming opposition from all the parties in Northern Ireland to the cuts. The Training and Employment Agency's review of long-term unemployment, which was due last October, has still not yet been published. Will the Minister delay implementation of further cuts until we have had a chance to consider that document?

Mr. Ancram: We hope that the report will be published fairly soon. It is easy for the hon. Gentleman to make those criticisms from the Dispatch Box, but if he is saying—as he appeared to be—that we should not be making these cuts within the bloc, it behoves him to say where we should be making cuts instead. We have to

decide on the priorities in the light of falling unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment. There are other priorities and we have to take hard decisions at this time because of the security situation. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, as an Opposition spokesman, will bear his share of the responsibility for making the same message as I am.

Peace Process

2. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has held with his counterparts in the Irish Government and with the representatives of Northern Ireland's political parties on the peace process; and what progress has been made. [16360]

5. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the development of the peace process. [16364]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): There has been intensive contact with the participants in the talks, including the Irish Government. On 7 February I met the Irish Foreign Minister and we discussed several issues, including the development of the process. The talks process continues to offer the best opportunity of securing a political settlement underpinning a true and lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Alton: Although I welcome the continued efforts of both Governments to find a peaceful solution to the problems of Northern Ireland, does the Secretary of State agree that the major impediment to making progress is the continued and sustained use of violence in Northern Ireland, not least through punishment beatings and intimidation on estates and in neighbourhoods, where people—and especially young people—are being systematically abused? Is the Secretary of State aware that only last night a 19-year-old girl was abducted from a taxi rank in Armagh, held at a lamp post, covered in paint, beaten up and left with a placard around her neck? Earlier this week a 19-year-old was set about with a club with nails attached and a 12-year-old child was set about with a baseball bat by a gang of thugs. At a rate of 15 to 20 attacks per week, is not such intimidation and terror holding up the whole possibility of peaceful progress being made?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman is exactly right. Unfortunately that is only part of the things that are holding up the development of this process. The Chief Constable has calculated that attacks on the security forces have been taking place at an average rate of about one every 30 hours since the beginning of this year. There can be no place in a democracy for violence perpetrated for political reasons. Only if and when those who seek to participate in the talks which are continuing make it credibly clear that they have set aside violence for ever will they cease to exclude themselves.

Mr. Canavan: As this may be the Secretary of State's last ever Question Time, will he take this opportunity to make an announcement today which might help to further the peace process, especially as the marching season is due to begin again next month? Will he announce the Government's intention to implement in full the recommendation of Dr. North's review, including the establishment of a parades commission with powers to make determinations, if necessary, to avoid the kind of ugly confrontations that took place at Drumcree last year and the year before? At that time, the so-called rule of law was replaced by mob rule, with the support of certain hon. Members of the House who put their own selfish interests and those of their party before the interests of the broader community.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I hesitate to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but I am looking forward to having another Question Time before I hang up these boots. I know the interest that the hon. Gentleman takes and the sincere concern that he has for the development of democracy in Northern Ireland. I made the Government's response clear two or three weeks ago in the House, when the North report was published. We accepted at once part of the recommendations. We thought it prudent—and we have been supported in this very widely thereafter—to consult up to the end of March on the remaining parts, and that is what we are doing. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to be concerned that there should not be a repetition in this marching season of the terrible events of last year, and I share his concern.

Mr. Trimble: Will the Secretary of State make it clear in his contacts with the Irish Government that one of the reasons why so little progress has been made in the inter-party talks is the attitude that they have adopted? I am thinking particularly of statements from those close to the Irish Foreign Minister to the effect that talking to us is not worth a penny candle. The Irish Foreign Ministry's representatives constantly attempt to change the terms of the talks to enable Sinn Fein-IRA to enter them fully armed and with the capacity to continue using their weapons. Will the Secretary of State make it clear to the Irish Government that if they are to make a positive contribution to the process a significant change in their policies will be required?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I do not recognise any distinction between the Irish Government's policy vis-à-vis the entry of Sinn Fein into the talks and our own. Both Governments believe and insist that there should be an unequivocal restoration of a ceasefire that is credible—that is shown to be credible. In doing that, we are merely implementing the ground rules agreed between the two Governments for the conduct of the talks. That is perfectly clear.

I have always found it rather unprofitable to comment on individual statements made from any point in the spectrum and resurrected weeks, months, years or even decades later, and I do not propose to depart from my practice today. I see Irish Ministers frequently, I find their attitude and approach to these extremely difficult matters constructive, and I am grateful for that.

Rev. Ian Paisley: How can the Secretary of State think that by pursuing the conflicting views of members of the Government he can establish confidence? When Stephen Restorick was brutally murdered, the Prime Minister issued a strong statement that the person or persons who

did it would be hunted and would be brought to justice. In the other place, Baroness Denton informed us that people would no doubt have strange feelings that the House

"should be contemplating the decommissioning of the weapon which was used to murder Stephen Restorick."

She also referred to the

"necessary loss of evidence".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 25 February 1997; Vol. 578, c. 1041.]

On the one hand, we say that we will follow these people and bring them to justice while on the other hand we carry out a policy that will give them a veritable amnesty. How can the law-abiding citizens of Northern Ireland, who have suffered so much on both sides of the divide, have any confidence?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman ought to be a bit more careful, if he will allow me to say so. There is no question of an amnesty for any offence committed using any weapon. He knows that to be the case as it was explained fully when the House dealt with the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Bill, which was passed with substantial support. Of course it is right that everyone who perpetrates a foul crime, such as the murder of Lance Bombardier Restorick, is pursued with every lawful means. I give that assurance now.

It is also important for weapons to be taken out of circulation. Both Houses of Parliament have recognised the principle that a scheme for the decommissioning, the handing over, the putting out of harm's way of lethal weapons must have a limited immunity from prosecution for the offence, which will be brought to light, of holding that weapon while it is being handed over. That tight limitation is imposed on the amnesty.

Dr. Hendron: The Secretary of State is aware of the unexploded bomb in my constituency of West Belfast last night. He is also aware of the young lady in Armagh whose hair was shaved off and who had paint poured over her head. We also had the horrific murder of Stephen Restorick. Bearing it in mind that the talks process in Castle Buildings will almost certainly be adjourned very shortly because of the impending parliamentary election, will the Secretary of State give an assurance that, whatever Government are in place after the election, those talks will be renewed immediately afterwards and providing that there is an unequivocal and genuine ceasefire—I emphasise the word "genuine"—Sinn Fein will be admitted to the talks?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have already this afternoon set out the shared position of both Governments in regard to the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question. As to the first part, it was again due to the extreme professionalism of the security forces that a murderous attack was forestalled last night in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and also in another part of Belfast. That is wholly incompatible with any credibility being attached to professions of seeking peace. As to the future of the talks, that will of course depend on the participants in the talks, but I take great heart from the fact that those participating in the talks have almost universally expressed the desire that, after a period in cold storage, they will resume. It is the intention of everyone that they resume in as positive an environment as possible.

Mr. Dykes: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for clarifying, at least indirectly, in answer to earlier questions the fact that the close relationship between the Irish Government and the United Kingdom Government is one of the important keys to the future success of the longer-term peace process. Does he not agree, however, that despite the massive collective grief that we still feel over the murder of Lance Bombardier Restorick, out of that very sad occasion in Peterborough, which was attended by my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) and others, came inspiration in the extraordinarily wise words of the family of the murdered soldier and in the invitations to the lady who had been in the car when the soldier was murdered and to the rest of her family from Ireland? Is that not on a level with the late Senator Wilson in providing the inspiration of millions of people wanting peace in the Province and in the Republic of Ireland when a small number of extremists on all sides still wish to perpetuate extremism and the exclusive use of continuing vetoes?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I repeat expressions of appreciation that I have already publicly made for the extraordinary dignity of the response of Lance Bombardier Restorick's parents and couple them with my appreciation of what was said by Mrs. Lorraine McElroy, the passenger in the car. Incidentally, Lance Bombardier Restorick was very concerned that those helping him should know that she had been injured. That is a measure of the type of young man that he was. I very much hope that the contrast between the fineness of the behaviour of that young man, the dignity of what has been said by people, which has already been mentioned today, and the squalor and disgusting character of the crime will have its own effect.

Ms Mowlam: May I identify myself with the comments that the Secretary of State has just made? Does he agree that the job of the parties who have tried to make progress in the talks has been made much harder by the on-going IRA violence and that it must stop immediately? Will he join me in saying that, whatever the outcome of the general election, the talks about a just and peaceful settlement for Northern Ireland will be pursued with every determination? Does he agree that, if Sinn Fein wants to be part of that process, the IRA violence must stop and their warm words about peace must be backed up by actions that prove that they mean it? Will he join me in saying that a new British Government, of whichever party, will be unbending in their opposition to violence but will continue his current willingness to respond positively to a genuine desire for peace?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I think that many people will take reassurance from what the hon. Lady has said in the latter part of that question. What these people have got to know and learn is that they cannot look forward to being able to turn violence off and then turn violence on again. That is what is meant by the need for a credible, unequivocal ceasefire, a setting aside for good—not just for a tactical period—of the use of violence for political purposes. I agree with what she says about the importance of the talks process.

Education Expenditure

3. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the per capita expenditure on education in the current year; what was the equivalent figure in May 1979; and if he will make a statement. [16362]

Mr. Ancram: Expenditure on education per head of population is £846 in 1996–97. In 1979–80, the equivalent figure was £254, or £665 at 1996–97 prices.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures are a matter for congratulation? Does he further agree that the continuing excellence of education in Northern Ireland owes a great deal to the fact that schools there never gave up proper selection, as the Labour party has sought to do? Labour has constantly opposed selection and Labour Members cannot be trusted when they say that they are eschewing their permanent opposition to it. Whatever they say on education, they cannot be believed in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales or anywhere else.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks and I agree with him. Given the education system in Northern Ireland, the results reflect favourably in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland, 52 per cent. of pupils gain five or more GCSEs at grade C and above, while the figure for Great Britain is some 45 per cent. The same pattern emerges in respect of A-levels. In Northern Ireland, 87 per cent. of pupils achieve at least two A-levels compared with 77 per cent. in England. The figures reflect very well on Northern Ireland's education system. Although a selective system produces good results at the top end of the scale, we must make sure that the low achievers are also well served. The number of pupils leaving school without qualifications in Northern Ireland has dropped considerably and is now below the level for Great Britain.

Mr. Beggs: The figures quoted by the Minister to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) sound well and probably read well to those who do not understand the extreme financial pressure on principals and school governors in medium-sized primary schools and secondary schools which do not receive additional funds through the raising school standards initiatives or which have their funding distorted by the targeting social need fund. May I put it to the Minister that there is something seriously wrong when large sums are flowing to grammar schools under targeting social need? We are annoyed by that. While we condemn the 60 attacks on our schools last year, we are concerned that our pupils are being penalised and punished because of the wanton vandalism and terrorism that the Government have failed to control by improving security measures. When will we have a system of fair and equal distribution of funding to all our children in all our schools in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Ancram: We try as far as possible to reflect the needs within Northern Ireland's education in the formulas by which allocations are made. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not disagree that in the raising school standards initiative we are identifying particular schools where there have been low rates of achievement and specifically addressing funds to those schools.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the formulas and I know where he is coming from on that. The actual allocation to individual schools under TSN has been to a large extent on the basis of the number of free school meal take-ups. I have now asked the boards to look at the assessments that were recently put in place as another equally valid measure of deprivation and need within a particular school in educational terms. The assessments have only just been put in place and we shall have to see how they work in order to use them effectively.

My purpose is to use the scarce funds that are available because of the security situation in the fairest way in an attempt to achieve the best education in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am sure that my right hon. Friend would wish to pay tribute to the excellent work of everyone involved in education in Northern Ireland for keeping normality in the schools and excellence throughout the system. Getting away from security matters for once, will he tell the House what is being done about information technology in schools in Northern Ireland? Are pupils being introduced to the Internet? Are schools getting the computers that they need and are they building the experience that they will need for future employment?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for moving us away from the security situation. I pay tribute to all those who work in education in Northern Ireland for the way in which they have managed to maintain a high quality of education and provided stability for the children in the recent difficult years. Within available resources, we are anxious for information technology to be introduced to as many schools as possible. The current pattern is varied: some schools are very advanced in their IT provision and some are not. It is encouraging that the universities are beginning to explore the use of new technology in education in a way that will benefit schools and further education colleges in the longer term.

Mr. Worthington: When the Minister allocated money to schools this year, what calculation did he make of the number of teachers who would lose their jobs and the impact of that on the pupil-teacher ratio? Is it true that he still does not know how many teachers lost their jobs last year as a consequence of his budget decisions? Why does he not know the consequences of his actions?

Mr. Ancram: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the pupil-teacher ratio in Northern Ireland is better than in Great Britain. We take some pride in that. The boards have to decide their financial plans. Until those plans are before us, we cannot make an exact assessment. In my guidance to the boards, I have always tried to ensure that classroom provision is maintained, even if that has meant some difficult cuts in other areas such as youth provision, libraries and, as I announced on Tuesday, a smaller than usual capital programme. I have skewed the priorities to ensure that provision in the classroom remains at the top of the list, because that is the key to education.

Northern Ireland Forum

4. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of the groups that were successful

in the election to the Northern Ireland Forum have expressed support for a ceasefire and a peaceful solution to problems in the Province; and which have not. [16363]

Mr. Ancram: Of the 10 political parties elected to the negotiations in the election of 30 May last year, nine have expressed their commitment to the six Mitchell principles of democracy and non-violence, as they are required to do on entry to the talks process. The remaining party, Sinn Fein, remains outside the talks process and will continue to do so until an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire is in place.

Mr. Shaw: Does my hon. Friend agree that the loyalist community—as well as some nationalists—have shown a real desire to resist the recent violent provocations? Does he also agree that the credibility of Sinn Fein-IRA is as low as it can be and we do not yet see any opportunity for them to condemn violence? Should they not be condemned for taking that position?

Mr. Ancram: I make no bones about condemning the recent activities, which can be described only as murderous, vicious and cowardly. That includes the shooting of Lance Bombardier Restorick for which, I understand, the IRA has finally claimed responsibility. It is clear to everyone in Northern Ireland that, far from moving towards the commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and the adherence to democratic principles required of Sinn Fein if it wants to become part of the talks process, the activities of the IRA are making the credibility gap ever wider.

Mr. Livingstone: Given the Government's clear determination to exclude Sinn Fein until the IRA campaign stops, and given the frequent statements from the republican leadership that it has no intention of restoring the ceasefire, does the Minister have any proposals for increased security measures to defeat the IRA campaign—or are the people of Northern Ireland doomed to live with the situation for ever?

Mr. Ancram: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's concern about security. We have noted carefully—in the light of some of the companionship that he enjoys—his injunctions on the Government to increase security measures. The British Government are not alone: the Irish Government have also made it clear that an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire is necessary for Sinn Fein to participate in the negotiations. The reason for that is simple: the negotiations can proceed only on the basis of confidence. When there is direct or indirect duress or threat of resumed violence from one party if it does not get its way, the negotiations cannot proceed.

If that party signs up to democratic principles and exclusively peaceful methods, that confidence can be created, and it can become part of the negotiations.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best contribution that the United Kingdom Government can make to a peaceful solution in Northern Ireland is consistently to promote, advocate and support the status and integrity of Northern Ireland within the UK and consistently to praise and express appreciation for all the political parties in Northern Ireland—not least the Official Unionist party—for their very positive contribution to a peaceful solution?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments, which I am sure will have been heard by hon. Members on the Opposition Benches. In the democracy that is the United Kingdom, the Government are totally committed to ensuring that the democratic wishes of the people of Northern Ireland in relation to the status of Northern Ireland are supported and promoted.

Mr. Barnes: Has the Minister noticed that the Northern Ireland Forum is quite an interesting body? It has been boycotted by Sinn Fein from the start, and is now boycotted by the SDLP. It is therefore virtually a Unionist organisation, yet it has passed some quite radical motions: on water privatisation, on the establishment of a disability rights commission, and, against the Government's position, on BSE. Is it not therefore rather strange that the Unionists adopt a rather different position in this House from the unanimous one adopted in the Northern Ireland Forum, which acts rather like a Labour party conference—or should I say, an old Labour party conference?

Mr. Ancram: As the hon. Gentleman will recall, the Northern Ireland Forum was set up with the purpose of promoting dialogue and understanding. I have to say that I am not sure whether some of the things it discusses would necessarily fit easily into that definition, but it has produced some very interesting comments on certain issues, and, as he knows, I have taken account of some of them.

Security Situation

6. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the implications for the political peace process in Northern Ireland of the current security situation. [16365]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The IRA continues its murderous attacks, indifferent to whom it may kill or maim. In the absence of the IRA declaring and implementing an unequivocal ceasefire that is credible, Sinn Fein continues to exclude itself from the process of talks. With or without its participation, we shall continue to further the process of inclusive and comprehensive talks.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is it not time to pay tribute to the steadfastness of my right hon. and learned Friend and his ministerial team in their insistence that the governance of Northern Ireland shall always be democratically decided, and will never change in response to intimidation, fear, any atrocity or any political pressure that is imposed by the apologists of violence such as Sinn Fein?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: We are certainly steadfast in that policy and in that cause. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said. It is slightly unnerving to have a tribute paid to one in this post.

Sir James Molyneaux: Does the Secretary of State agree that the most significant impact on all the

proceedings is the emerging fact that Sinn Fein-IRA totally abhors the principle of consent, and has thereby lost all sympathy and support throughout the world? Does he agree that this is the time for progress on the restoration of practical measures to restore effective administration to the people of Northern Ireland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that Sinn Fein and the IRA have steadfastly refused to endorse the principle of consent, thereby, of course, refusing to endorse the foundation of democracy. I very much wish that greater responsibility was able to be exercised by people elected for that purpose in Northern Ireland. It is the purpose of the talks process to find a means by which, based on consent and comprehensive agreement, that can be achieved.

As I approach the end of my tenure, I am no more enamoured of direct rule than I was at the very beginning. About the first thing that I said in public was that I needed to enhance democratic responsibility in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Bellingham: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that currently one of the most distasteful sights in Northern Ireland is the unauthorised IRA signs in South Armagh proclaiming "Sniper at Work"? Does he agree that they are an insult not only to the family of the lance-bombardier but to all those residents who expressed their dismay over his murder? Whose responsibility are those signs, and when will they be taken down?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I very much agree with my hon. Friend's comments on the signs. I think that they are an insult, and that they are provocative and revolting. I understand that they are occasionally taken down. I will write to my hon. Friend, if he will allow me to do so, about the implications of his question.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not of interest that, following the cowardly murder last week of the British soldier, the Taoiseach made it perfectly clear that those responsible—the IRA—were the dedicated enemies of the Republic of Ireland, as indeed they are of Northern Ireland and of the entire United Kingdom? No doubt the Taoiseach will make his views quite clear when he speaks at Monday's meeting in Dublin of the British-Irish parliamentary body. Is it not important for the IRA to realise that murdering British soldiers will not in any way bring a united Ireland one step nearer, that such murders are totally unjustified, and that those who commit them are committing crimes against humanity?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I warmly endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments, and pay tribute to his holding consistently to those views and to his expression of them. I noticed that Mr. Bruton, the Taoiseach, said recently:

"The IRA campaign is anti-Irish and contrary to the interests of all in Ireland."

I pay tribute to that comment, and endorse it. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that no amount of violence or of criminal murderous activity will deflect the Government or those in the security forces who steadfastly serve all the people of Northern Ireland from their duty—which is to uphold democracy and to protect the rule of law.

Ms Mowlam: Does the Secretary of State agree that progress on this summer's parades have implications also for political progress? With that in mind, we welcome the measures he announced yesterday in response to recommendations in the North report. Will he now tell the House when he expects to announce the membership of the Parades Commission? As he is halfway through his further consultation, will he also tell us what additional information he has gained from the submissions made to him on the nature of the powers that the commission should have?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: It is premature to say anything about the nature of the submissions or about the results of the consultation when the consultation is incomplete. It will be completed at the end of March, and we have a genuinely open mind until then. I hope to be able to announce the composition of the commission fairly shortly. We attach great importance to its establishment and to its early assumption of those powers that we have accepted straight away as being proper.

Youth Unemployment

7. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on youth unemployment in Northern Ireland. [16366]

Mr. Ancram: At 9 January 1997, there were 17,130 unemployed young people, aged under 25, in Northern Ireland. That is a decrease of 3,594, or 17.3 per cent., in the past year. The decreases in unemployment are evident in all parts of the Province.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures are very good news for young people in Northern Ireland, and a tribute to the economic policies that have been pursued by the Government? Has not inward investment also played an important part in the decrease in unemployment?

Mr. Ancram: Indeed it has, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. It is also interesting to note that, in September 1996, employment was at the highest September figure ever. That also bodes well for the Province. The decrease reflects the fact that there has been much inward investment. The Government's economic policies have been good. Particularly by not signing up for the social chapter, we have managed to attract industry to Northern Ireland which otherwise would not have come.

Mr. William Ross: On the basis that the devil will always find work for idle hands to do, will the Minister examine very carefully the strange imbalance between male and female unemployment rates in Northern Ireland, and confirm that those rates are mirrored in youth unemployment? What does he intend to do this summer to give work to young people to take them off the streets?

Mr. Ancram: I will look into that, but I do not have an answer at the moment. I will ask my noble Friend Baroness Denton, and I will write to the hon. Gentleman. We are concerned about the marginalisation of young people in Northern Ireland, precisely because of the activities that the young unemployed can get up to. Unemployment is a priority in the Department of

Education, and an interdepartmental working group is addressing the issue. I hope that it will report later this year.

Dr. Godman: Does the Minister agree that many unemployed youngsters are badly handicapped in the labour market by their appalling lack of educational qualifications? Is it not time for a radical reappraisal of the policy for targeting social needs funds? Those funds should be wholly directed to schools in deprived areas.

Mr. Ancram: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, we are directing money, through targeting social needs funds, to specific schools, and the results are shown in the substantial reduction in the number leaving schools without qualifications. The greatest improvement for the unemployed, young or old, in Northern Ireland would be for peace to be restored, so that the economy could grow and jobs be created.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 February. [16389]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Gerrard: While the victims of Gulf war syndrome continue to suffer illness and are denied compensation, is it not a disgrace that no one in the Government is prepared to accept any personal responsibility for what has happened? As there is no doubt that service personnel and their families were seriously misled by the Ministry of Defence, does not that denial of responsibility prove that the assessment by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) of the Secretary of State for Defence as "not honourable" was spot on?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman is genuinely concerned about the question of compensation, he will know that service personnel in this country can claim compensation for loss or injury caused by negligent action. There is a satisfactory way to do that. In order to consider compensation claims fairly, we need to establish what caused the ailments. There have been a series of inquiries, which are continuing, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has reported to the House.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the procedure whereby the minutes of the meetings between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Governor of the Bank of England are published is healthy, because it leads to open government? Does he further agree that any Chancellor who abandoned that procedure might leave himself open to the suspicion that he was trying to fudge things on the economy?

The Prime Minister: Such a suspicion might be there. I think many people might be suspicious about why the shadow Chancellor is talking about a Budget this summer, were he to become Chancellor of the Exchequer. I hardly believe that it would be a Budget that reduced taxation. If the right hon. Gentleman has a Budget of a different type in mind, perhaps—like one of his predecessors as shadow Chancellor—he might care to publish it before the election.

Mr. Blair: May I refer the Prime Minister back to the subject of the Ministry of Defence, and ask him about the Defence Select Committee report this morning into defence medical services? Does he agree with the report's central conclusion that so badly has the Ministry of Defence managed change that either we would send our troops into a crisis without proper medical back-up, or we would have to limit the number of troops we sent? That is a shocking conclusion. Do the Government accept it?

The Prime Minister: Of course we will examine the report of the Defence Select Committee. *[Interruption.]* I think the House would expect me to examine a report by hon. Members before I responded to a long and detailed report that I have not yet had the opportunity to read. If I were to respond in any other way, the House would ask how I could have known. I can say to the right hon. Gentleman that, although I have not yet read the report myself—but I most certainly will—I have been advised that the defence medical services can provide the medical support necessary to assist British troops on operational deployments, as they have done in the Gulf and in Bosnia. I have received that advice from the Ministry of Defence. But I reiterate the point that, of course, if a Select Committee reports, I shall examine that report carefully, and we shall respond in the usual fashion when the examination is completed.

Mr. Blair: I thank the Prime Minister for that, but he should be aware that precisely the same assurances were given two years ago, and the Defence Select Committee examined them and found them ultimately to be worthless. The language used in the report is fairly strong, saying that the situation is so serious that the service cannot recover, and that

"No amount of self-justification can disguise"

the state of the service. The Prime Minister said that he wanted to examine the report. That is fair enough, but if, having examined it, he finds that its findings are accurate, which Minister will take responsibility?

The Prime Minister: I think that we had better wait for the examination and see what the outcome is. The right hon. Gentleman is keen to determine blame before there is any certainty that there is any blame to be determined. I suggest that he wait until we have examined the report, as of course we shall. There has been some restructuring of the defence medical services, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. I welcome the Committee's endorsement, which he did not mention, of the new secondary care structures. That is very welcome.

Mr. Rooker: So you have read it.

The Prime Minister: I have not read the report—but I have received preliminary advice on it, and I shall read it. When I have read it, I shall report upon it in full. Let me return from the side issue raised by the hon. Member

for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) to the question asked by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). I think that Select Committee reports require more attention than just a summary and one morning, and that is what the report will get from the Government. That may be how the Opposition would respond to reports from the House, but it is not how I respond to them.

Of course there have been teething problems. The Ministry of Defence has recognised that, and we are determined to overcome them.

Mr. Blair: May I point out to the Prime Minister that yesterday we had a highly critical report on Ministers' handling of the use of pesticides in the Gulf war, today the Defence Select Committee says that there is serious doubt about front-line defence capability, as a result of changes that the Government have made, and that next week, apparently, a further report is to be made? I simply ask him: does anyone in this Government ever take responsibility for anything?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman cares to look at the history of Gulf war syndrome, he will see the action that has been taken. He will also, I hope, acknowledge that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces came voluntarily and immediately to the House the moment that it was drawn to his attention that he had not been advised accurately by his officials. My hon. Friend did as he should have done, and came immediately to the House.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about responsibility, but he is not in a position to criticise on that front—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh yes, he is."] I am surprised to hear that, because, despite his call for openness in government, when it was found that his office was being funded in an odd way, the right hon. Gentleman would not accept responsibility; and when somebody tried to rig a poll on Radio 4, he said that that was nothing to do with him. No responsibility was accepted for that. When it turns out that the worst 20 education authorities in the country, including Islington, are Labour-run, that, too, is apparently nothing to do with the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the publication of examination results has led to a significant improvement in standards in secondary schools? In the light of that, may I welcome the fact that the results of the tests for 11-year-olds in primary schools will be published school by school? Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that the Government will do all they can to resist the attempts by the unions and the Labour party to undermine those tests?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly offer that assurance. The Labour party has objected to tests from the outset. It is not keen on children being tested, and it is less keen on the test results being made available to parents. Many people who are now used to receiving those test results would resent very much any suggestion from any quarter that that information should no longer be available to parents.

Mr. Ashdown: In his answer to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), the Prime Minister referred to those suffering from Gulf war syndrome as suffering from "ailments". May I remind him that these are not ailments, but serious illnesses that threaten the quality of people's lives? Is not the question on organophosphates very simple? Which Minister—either personally or through incompetence in his Department—allowed our service men to be exposed to the risk of organophosphates when other Ministers were making it clear that organophosphates were extremely dangerous? Will the Prime Minister comment?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman did not set out the position accurately before he asked his question.

Mr. Ashdown: Yes, I did.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman says that he did—he seems to know more than all the people who have examined the matter for some time. Yet I fear he does not. As usual, he is in the business of scapegoating without knowing the facts.

Dame Jill Knight: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the trade union Unison has been making direct threats against private firms which have had the temerity to put in for contracts with Birmingham city council, to the effect that, should those contracts be granted, strikes, disruptions and go-slows will follow? Is he aware that at least one such firm has been so frightened that it has pulled out of a contract? Will he take steps to get rid of those typical Labour bully-boy tactics, and ensure that there is free and fair competition for the small businesses of Birmingham?

The Prime Minister *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: Wait until Wirral.

The Prime Minister: Is not that interesting? The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) says, "Wait until Wirral." He does not address the issue, and he is not concerned about Unison. The Labour party is opposed to privatisation, but the right hon. Gentleman is sponsored by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers—which has benefited from privatisation. There is a word for that, and I believe that it is hypocrisy. It seeps out of the deputy leader of the Labour party, who sits there shouting.

On the subject of responsibility, Labour controls Birmingham—it is a Labour council. Let us have some action and responsibility from the leader of the Labour party about the council's activities. Perhaps he can stop talking to his right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, and listen to what is being said in this House.

Q2. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 February. [16391]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Salmond: Does the Prime Minister understand why, after six years, many people will find his reply on compensation for the victims of Gulf war syndrome

totally inadequate? How were people meant to process claims when the Department would not admit to using organophosphates? Does he know that recent estimates of those afflicted by the condition have reached 1,100—10 times those killed and maimed in the original conflict? Therefore, is not the case for compensation overwhelming? Should not someone in his ministerial team have the simple integrity to accept responsibility for six years of departmental dissembling?

The Prime Minister: As far back as 1993, the Ministry of Defence established a medical assessment programme to try to diagnose why Gulf war veterans were ill. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, having just issued his charge, should listen to what has happened. The methodology of the programme was audited by the Royal College of Physicians and subsequently endorsed in 1995. That programme, which commenced in 1993, did not produce any evidence of a new pattern of illness. None the less, the Government decided that more work needed to be done.

From the outset, we have been determined to find out what caused the illness of troops, so that action could be taken to put it right. In such circumstances, the question of compensation could be dealt with; but we need the facts before that can be done, and the medical committees are still determining what the facts may be. However the hon. Gentleman and the leader of the Labour party may try to bend reality, it is necessary to establish those facts, so that we can provide the compensation and medical treatment that may be necessary.

Mr. Rathbone: Whatever difficulties our forces may have faced in the Gulf, will my right hon. Friend reiterate the Government's support for the Reserve Army, and especially the territorials?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to do that.

Q3. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 February. [16392]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Welsh: Will the Prime Minister admit that the Government's failure to resolve the BSE crisis has cost taxpayers billions of pounds and the beef industry hundreds of millions, and that still there is no end in sight? Given that the latest scheme merely scratches the surface of the problem, when will Scottish farmers be able to escape the ban? Let us have a date; and a real date this time.

The Prime Minister: There was no reason for the imposition of the ban to begin with, but its lifting, alas, is not within the control of the Government or the House. I said that we had negotiated conditions that we had to meet, so that those who imposed the ban could lift it; we have met the conditions, but the lifting of the ban lies with those who imposed it. I should have thought that even the hon. Gentleman could understand that.

Q4. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 February. [16390]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Brown: May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to an issue of which I gave him notice? There is a problem in my constituency of stowaways who have been arriving dead, unfortunately, in the holds of small ships arriving at New Holland and Immingham. It appears that the ships originate; Nigeria and Sierra Leone, and I wonder whether my right hon. Friend might ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to get in touch with the ambassadors or high commissioners of those countries. The people travel in dreadful conditions, and, although they are illegal immigrants, they arrive dead, and something needs to be done about it.

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to consider that matter. My hon. Friend may also want to discuss the matter with my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping. As he may know, the United Kingdom played a leading role in developing guidelines to ensure that stowaways are dealt with promptly and humanely.

The people to whom my hon. Friend refers are patently stowaways, who, despite the usual checks and searches, are not discovered when the ships leave their original ports. We need to examine, with both the host countries and the shipping lines, better arrangements to ensure that people are not hidden away on their ships, as that is clearly the source of the tragedies to which my hon. Friend refers.

Criminal Justice

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): With permission, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Will the Minister wait a moment until hon. Members have left quietly, so that we can hear his statement? Will hon. Members please leave quietly and quickly? *[Interruption.]* I do not want to hear the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks); I want to hear the Secretary of State.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. With permission, I want to make a statement about improving the speed of justice in England and Wales.

Confidence in any criminal justice system relies on its ability to convict the guilty and acquit the innocent and to do so quickly. Over the past three years, the Government have taken action to even up the scales of justice. At the same time, we have taken action to speed up our criminal justice process.

Progress has been made: in the Crown court, waiting lists fell by a fifth last year, and the number of cases outstanding has been reduced by a quarter. At magistrates courts, the proportion of summary only cases completed at first appearance reached 76 per cent. last year—10 per cent. more than in 1995.

However, more needs to be done. Although the number of indictable cases coming before the magistrates courts fell by 11 per cent. between 1985 and 1995, the average number of days taken to complete a case from the date of the offence increased by 36 per cent., from 98 to 132 days, and the number of adjournments increased by 44 per cent. Entirely proper safeguards for defendants, such as advance information and the reforms introduced in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, have made the process more complex; but on top of that, an adjournment culture has developed. That is why, last autumn, my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and I decided to set up a fundamental review of the speed of justice. The review has now been concluded and today I am publishing its report and placing copies in the Library.

The Government see merit in the report and propose to invite interested parties to express their views. We shall reach decisions in due course, having considered those views. The report makes 33 recommendations. One of them, recommendation 23, is now largely superfluous as the Lord Chancellor and the four senior designated judges yesterday approved—subject to certain restrictions—the Law Society's application for rights of audience for employed solicitors in the higher courts. That meets the review's proposal that employed solicitors in the Crown Prosecution Service should be granted rights of audience for plea and directions hearings at the Crown court.

The report's remaining recommendations fall into five main areas. The first deals with bringing alleged offenders to court. Considerable improvements have been made in recent years in the relationship between the police and the CPS. Abbreviated files for guilty pleas dramatically reduce police paperwork. Joint performance management and CPS lawyer surgeries in police stations are delivering improvements. However, the business of getting cases ready for court still falls into two distinct halves: police preparation of the file, and the review of the file by the CPS. The report recommends that the two halves should be brought together. Some CPS staff should be brought into police stations on a permanent basis, to work with the police in what would visibly be a joint effort in bringing offenders to justice. The independence of the CPS would still be preserved, but independence does not require isolation.

The decision to prosecute would still be subject to two tests: whether the evidence was sufficient, and whether prosecution was in the public interest. However, the report recommends a change to the CPS public interest test, which currently allows a case to be discontinued if the alleged offence is minor, or the likely penalty trivial. That change would assist chief constables to target particular crimes, often of an anti-social nature, which in themselves would not necessarily be regarded as serious, but which can make life a misery for innocent people, creating conditions in which more serious crime can flourish.

One significant cause of delay at present is that the time taken by defendants to obtain legal aid means that cases cannot be brought to court immediately after charge. The report recommends that all defendants who intend to plead guilty should obtain legal advice and representation from the duty solicitor at court. That would be free of charge. It would also be extremely prompt, being given on the morning of the day on which the court appearance took place. That would mean that defendants who pleaded guilty would be dealt with the day after they were charged. The effect would be dramatic: for more than half of all defendants charged, the proceedings could be completed the next day—compared with under 3 per cent. now.

When a defendant pleaded not guilty, an application for legal aid would be made in the normal way, but it would have to be made promptly. The report recommends that courts should insist that defendants who fail to take adequate steps to secure representation or legal aid have to use the duty solicitor in court that day unless they decide not to be represented.

Next, the report recommends that those pleading not guilty should also appear in court the day after charge at an early administrative hearing, to be conducted by the clerk to the justices. At that hearing, the defendant would be told what the court needed in order to consider eligibility for legal aid, and also about the nature of the forthcoming proceedings. Those hearings have been shown substantially to reduce adjournments.

The report also recommends that clerks to the justices should hold pre-trial reviews and be given additional administrative powers very similar to those that they already have in family proceedings. Pre-trial reviews will focus issues of dispute between the parties, so that cases are fully prepared for trial before they are put to magistrates. The principle should be that a case should not go before magistrates until it is ready to proceed and should then proceed without unnecessary adjournment. No one reading the report could fail to be impressed by the evidence from one pre-trial review, completed in one morning and observed by the reviewer, which obviated the need for no fewer than 15 police officers to attend future hearings.

I want to stress, however, that the intention behind extending clerks' powers would be to reinforce the lay magistracy, which has been described, quite rightly, as a

cornerstone of our system of justice. There has been some speculation in the press about stripping magistrates of some of their current powers. The reviewer makes no such recommendation and, had he done so, I would have rejected it.

The next area concerns the youth court. The proposals that I have already described for joint working between the police and the CPS and for legal aid reform would, in themselves, bring offenders to justice at the youth court much more quickly. In addition, the report makes recommendations specific to the youth court. The most important is that 17-year-olds should be returned to the jurisdiction of the adult court, leaving the youth court to deal more promptly with offenders of school-leaving age and below. It was the near-unanimous verdict of all those interviewed by the reviewer that 17-year-old offenders are too sophisticated for the youth court, where they account for about a third of all cases. They tend to be more experienced offenders and are often disruptive and unco-operative.

The second recommendation is that the police should make the decision whether to caution or to charge an offender immediately, rather than—as frequently happens now—refer the case for advice to a multi-agency panel. If there is any doubt, the case should go to the youth court. If the court decides that a caution might be appropriate, it should be able to give one and, when it sees fit, attach conditions to the caution, such as compensation or reparation to the victim. Young offenders would then be in court within days of being caught, rather than, as is frequently the case now, many weeks later.

Finally, the review makes recommendations about cases that go to the Crown court. About 20 per cent. of all those tried in the Crown court—about 24,000 defendants each year—insist on being tried there, despite magistrates having previously decided that the case was more suitable for them to deal with. About two thirds of those defendants then plead guilty at the Crown court. About three quarters are found guilty.

The reviewer recommends that it should be for magistrates to take the decision as to which cases triable either in magistrates courts or the Crown court, such as theft, handling stolen goods or burglary, need to be committed to the higher court. Those seeking Crown court trial without good reason, perhaps simply to delay proceedings, would no longer be able to overrule the magistrates' view that they should try the case. On the other hand, defendants with a good reason for jury trial—perhaps because of the complexity of the case, because they are defending an unblemished reputation or because of the potential effect of a conviction on the individual—would be able to present those reasons to magistrates, who would be free to commit the case.

That is not a new idea. It builds on a very similar recommendation made in 1993 by the royal commission on criminal justice. It recognised the need for a more rational basis for distributing cases between the courts and it noted that, in Scotland, the decision on whether a defendant should be entitled to jury trial is made by the prosecutor.

I recognise that this recommendation is extremely sensitive, as any proposal to restrict the availability of jury trial is bound to arouse strong feelings. Jury trial is a central feature of our system of justice and one to which the Government are entirely committed. We would not wish to restrict it without very careful thought. On the other hand, the report's recommendation offers substantial advantages. It would divert from the Crown court cases—often of a petty nature—which do not need to be there. It might also make it easier to pursue another of the report's recommendations, also favoured by the royal commission, under which the most serious offences, those triable only at the Crown court, could be handled more effectively and more speedily by starting there from the outset, rather than spending about half their life in magistrates courts awaiting committal.

We shall want to consider both those recommendations particularly carefully in the light of views expressed. If other avenues of approach are suggested, we shall of course consider them. There may also need to be a right of appeal against the magistrates' decision not to allow a case to go to the Crown court and, of course, anyone convicted by magistrates would, as now, have a right of appeal against conviction or sentence to a judge—but not a jury—at the Crown court.

Those are important proposals. More work needs to be done on the extent of the financial implications, and the Government want to listen to the views of those who work in the criminal justice system, on both the principles and the practicality of the recommendations, before making decisions. However, I am confident that, taken together, they could dramatically speed up the prosecution process, bringing the guilty to justice and acquitting the innocent more quickly and at lower cost.

Madam Speaker, let me remind you what the proposals would achieve if implemented. First, all defendants would appear in court the day after they were charged. Fewer than one in five do so now. Secondly, a pilot study has indicated that at least 50 per cent. of those defendants—those who indicate that they would plead guilty—would be convicted the day after they were charged. That happens in only 3 per cent. of cases now. Thirdly, the time taken to bring a young offender to court from the date of his offence—which is currently 10 weeks—would be no more than a few days. That would save the valuable time of all those engaged in the criminal justice process, including witnesses and victims. It would help to ensure that the energies of police officers could be spent protecting the public, rather than going backwards and forwards to magistrates courts.

Justice delayed is justice denied. The proposals have the potential, by drastically reducing delay and restoring the direct and speedy link between detection and conviction, to afford justice more speedily and in much greater measure to victims, to witnesses and to the general public alike.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): May I first thank the Secretary of State for his courtesy in allowing me to see this document in time for me to study it with care? We shall, of course, review it carefully, because it deserves detailed consideration.

Very late though they are, many of the specific proposals contained in today's statement are ones for which we have called, and they have our support. They include the proposal to reduce to 17 the maximum age at which defendants can go to juvenile courts—although I might add that that amounts to a complete reversal of a policy that the Government introduced only six years ago—and the change in the public interest test, to ensure

[Mr. Jack Straw]

that more minor offences can be prosecuted where local need requires that. It is doubtful, however, that issuing a consultative document such as this eight weeks before the general election will enable the Secretary of State to regain the initiative on law and order, which the Conservative party has so comprehensively lost.

Is not the real significance of the review published today that, to those who read it, it amounts to a catalogue of neglect and complacency on the part of the Government in their running of the criminal justice system? At long last, the Government have been forced to recognise crucial failings in the system on which the Opposition have demanded action for years, but in many respects, today's announcement is too little, too late. Is it not the case that when in May 1995 I called for major reform of the Crown Prosecution Service, Ministers said that none was needed? Now, the paper is as damning as we have been: it talks of "dislocation" between the police and the CPS and of the CPS "papering over the cracks". However, the proposals for reform—welcome though they are—do not go nearly far enough.

Is it not also the case that when nine months ago we published proposals for a root-and-branch reform of the shambles of the youth justice system, Ministers said that they were doing everything that was needed? Now, the paper confirms exactly what we have said—that it is the near-unanimous opinion of everyone connected with the youth courts that the system is unsatisfactory. The review quotes with approval the view of the distinguished youth justice stipendiary magistrate, Mr. Geoffrey Wicks, that the

"largest contribution to youth crime reduction would be the abolition of the youth courts"

in their present form. That is exactly what we have proposed.

Given the daily scandal of our youth justice system, in which half those found guilty are let off and in which persistent offenders wait for months and months for trial and offend time and again on bail, why is all that is proposed in this review just another review? Does the Secretary of State not recognise the urgency of establishing a fast-track system for persistent offenders, to halve the time taken between offence and proper punishment, as we have proposed?

Let me now refer to the proposal to end the right of many defendants to elect for trial by jury, even though they may face charges of dishonesty, and their reputation and their whole future may be at stake. I note that in his statement the Secretary of State has been altogether more tentative than those from his office who briefed the *Daily Mail* this morning. Surely, cutting down the right to jury trial, making the system less fair, is not only wrong but short-sighted, and likely to prove ineffective. I therefore urge the Secretary of State not to accept the proposal.

Is it not the case that that not only is the view of the Opposition and many practitioners and jurists, but was the view of the Secretary of State, at least until today? I wonder whether the Secretary of State has forgotten that in July 1995, in a consultation paper on the mode of trial, he said:

"Since currently two thirds of committals to the Crown Court are the result of magistrates' refusing jurisdiction, this has the potential to retain a larger amount of business than by limiting the defendants' right to elect for jury trial."

Has the Secretary of State forgotten that the Government rejected restricting the right to jury trial in favour of that proposal, which is now in section 49 of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996, passed only last year?

Is the Secretary of State aware that just nine months ago, in his final response to the royal commission, he made the following telling point:

"The Government . . . considers that such a fundamental change to the right to jury trial . . . should not be undertaken unless it is clear that would be the only possible way of achieving the objective"?

He went on to say that the effects of section 49

"will be monitored and the Royal Commission's recommendations reconsidered in the light of the result of that monitoring exercise."

Is the Secretary of State aware that section 49 has not yet even been implemented? Yet he now appears ready to rush ahead to restrict the right of jury trial, breaking the clear undertakings about monitoring the effect of section 49, which he gave only nine months ago.

If a police officer, a Member of Parliament or even a Secretary of State were charged with an offence of dishonesty, would they not insist on being tried by a jury? If that is the case, why should others be denied that right of election?

I also press the Secretary of State on whether the proposal will work as intended. Is he not aware that, despite a reduced case load, during the past 10 years delays in the magistrates court have increased by 50 per cent.—more than in the Crown court? Will not the proposal, forcing mini-trials on magistrates about which court should hear a case, the delays that might occur when there was an interlocutory appeal against a decision, and more contested trials in the magistrates court simply worsen those delays?

Does not the author of the review, Mr. Narey, undermine his whole case by admitting that the

"proportion of cases committed to the Crown Court . . . which are the result of defendant elections has dropped in recent [illegible]s"—

and that the problem, which can be dealt with in other ways, is that two thirds of referrals to the Crown Court are made, not by the election of the defendant, but by the magistrates alone declining to hear the case in their courts?

As any defendant convicted in a magistrates court has an absolute right to a complete rehearing of his case in the Crown court, might not there be a significant increase in such appeals to the Crown court, thus increasing the Crown court work load, too? That aspect was wholly ignored by the author and the royal commission.

Overall, does not the Home Secretary's statement represent a profound failure of the Government to honour their promises to maintain law and order in our society? Will not the voters of Wirral, South and elsewhere recognise the indelible facts of that failure, given that, after 18 years and 34 separate criminal justice Acts, crime has doubled, while the number of people convicted of those crimes has fallen by a third? There have been 2.5 million more recorded crimes since 1979, but 150,000 fewer people convicted by the courts for those crimes—much more crime, and many more criminals, especially young ones, getting off scot free.

Against that background, was not the former Home Office Minister and Cabinet Minister, the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), entirely correct when he said that the Conservative party had "lost the plot" on law and order?

Mr. Howard: I begin by acknowledging the good sense of the first few words of the hon. Gentleman's response to my statement, when he said that the report that I am publishing today deserves detailed consideration; that is indeed what it deserves. Unfortunately, having begun his response in that way, the hon. Gentleman proceeded to dismiss out of hand one of the report's central recommendations.

The hon. Gentleman seems to have entirely overlooked the way in which I dealt with that recommendation in my statement. I said that we would want to consider both that recommendation and the recommendation relating to indictable only offences starting in the Crown court particularly carefully in the light of views expressed, and expressly said that if other avenues of approach were suggested, we would of course consider them. Taken as a whole, however, the report represents a coherent package of measures, which together could have a dramatic impact on delays in our courts. Those of our fellow citizens who come into contact with such delays day after day, in all sorts of capacities—as witnesses, as victims and as jurors—want action to be taken to deal with those delays, and, taken as a whole, the package represents a significant way forward.

The hon. Gentleman referred to his party's proposals to reform the Crown Prosecution Service, and to my initial response to those proposals. It is perfectly true that I opposed Labour's proposals for reform when the hon. Gentleman announced them—because they were the wrong proposals for reform. They would have led to widespread dislocation, and would have been entirely counter-productive.

Mr. Straw: The fast track.

Mr. Howard: "The fast track," says the hon. Gentleman from a sedentary position. I noted that he did not go into any details of his fast-track proposals. That is not surprising. Those who examine his fast-track proposals will find them very illuminating. As with everything else, the figures do not add up. Labour proposes to stop legal aid in cases in which it is hardly ever granted at present, and claims to be able, with those non-existent savings, to deliver a completely non-deliverable pledge. It proposes that stipendiary magistrates should try juveniles, and that lay magistrates should then come along to the same case and sentence them. Those proposals are half-baked, and would not be given house room by any decent think tank.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): My right hon. and learned Friend is right to stress that two thirds of defendants in the either-way cases that go to jury trial end up pleading guilty. That must impose enormous costs on the courts, but more worrying is the delay that it causes for more serious cases that are properly tried by a jury. Would my right hon. and learned Friend care to speculate on how much of a saving could be made in terms of the current delays in serious trials, which worry so many of us?

Mr. Howard: The reviewer in the report reaches what he regards as the reasonably conservative conclusion that the savings that would result from his proposals overall might amount to something in the region of £110 million a year, of which £70 million would come from the specific proposal relating to the Crown courts. Let me emphasise, however, that those savings—welcome though they would be—are not the prime motive behind the proposals. We want to deal with the delays, with the dreadful inconvenience caused to those who have to go to court and with the extremely damaging effect on justice that is a consequence of those delays. That is the motivation behind the proposals.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I, too, am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for allowing me to see the review earlier today. It contains a number of worthwhile proposals, which we shall certainly consider, and which will speed up the criminal justice system.

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not recognise, however, that one part of the review is extremely badly flawed? I refer to the Soviet-style rewriting of history in the section that deals with the right to elect jury trial. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that, ever since defendants were first given the right to give evidence on their own behalf in trials, they have had the right to elect trial by jury? Does he not recognise that that is a fundamental freedom, which is not to be done away with in the cause of saving money?

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman further recognise that, if the proposals on the abolition of the right to elect jury trial were brought into effect, there would be a considerable increase in delays in magistrates courts, unless the Government were to take the view that a large additional number of stipendiary magistrates were to be appointed? Further, does he not recall that when the Crown Prosecution Service was established by the right hon. and learned Member for Tunbridge Wells (Sir P. Mayhew), the independence of the CPS was the benchmark behind its establishment? Does he not agree that the arm's length independence of the CPS remains very important; that while it is, of course, appropriate for police forces to have lawyers in police stations, those lawyers should not be part of the independent CPS, but should be employed by police forces—as is the case in many forces now—and advise those police forces?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for the qualified welcome that he gave to some of the proposals in the report. I do not think that his strictures on the perfectly accurate way in which the report deals with the history of jury trial were at all justified. I believe, as I said at the outset, that the proposal merits very careful consideration, and it has merit in it. I made it plain, immediately before he got to his feet, that we were not putting forward that or any other proposal in the package on financial grounds. I do not say that the savings will not be welcome, but that is not the reason why the proposals were made. They were put forward to speed up the system of justice that we have in this country, and to do away with the delays that disfigure it at the moment. That is extremely important.

[Mr. Howard]

As to the hon. and learned Gentleman's last point, I cannot see any justification whatever for erecting a whole new battery of lawyers in the system—lawyers employed by the police. I entirely agree with him and yield to no one in my recognition of the importance of the independence of the CPS. I believe that it has been a valuable addition to our system since it was set up in the early 1980s, but I do not believe, as I said in my statement, that independence need mean isolation. I do not think that that independence will be at all imperilled by the collocation of the CPS and the police in some police stations.

Mr. David Ashby (North–West Leicestershire): My right hon. and learned Friend will, perhaps, be aware that I do not agree with him that the right to trial by one's fellow men should be taken away in cases where dishonesty is involved. It is an ancient and well-tried right. One cannot be satisfied by the fact that we are told that two thirds plead guilty. What about the one third who plead not guilty? The whole concept of justice goes with that.

I am very worried that if we go down the road that the report advocates, many trials will have to be heard in the magistrates courts, and one of the problems with magistrates courts is that trials are often disrupted. Magistrates will hear one part one day, another part in a fortnight's time, and another a month after that. That cannot be justice in any sense of the word, but that is what happens. Is there anything in my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals to rectify that problem?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's criticism of the way in which some trials are conducted in magistrates courts and the delays that result from that. I believe that the proposals will go a considerable way towards improving that. The combination of early administrative hearings and pre-trial reviews will enable the justices' clerk to form a view before the case ever reaches the magistrates, for example, that it is a case that is likely to take three or four days to try. The clerk will then be in a position to make available justices for that period, so that the case will be heard in one go, as it should be, and not in the way that my hon. Friend identified, which happens far too frequently at present.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's criticism on that, and hope that some of the proposals will go a long way towards meeting it.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): As someone who acts as a duty solicitor, may I give the Home Secretary two pieces of advice? First, we should be selective, because having a pre-trial review in every case adds to expense, cost and time. Secondly, although it sounds attractive for people to appear in court the day after charge, it presents the police with considerable logistical problems. For example, the policeman may have been on duty all night. If the defendant is not in custody, it is not necessary for him to appear the next day. There should be a close link between the criminal act and its consequences, which is Labour party policy. Many measures are introduced for headlines rather than for effect.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his first point, which we shall take on board. It is an important matter on which we may want to reflect. As to his second point, I think that there would be considerable advantages in defendants appearing in court the day after they have been charged and, when they intend to plead guilty, being convicted the day after they have been charged. That would be a dramatic improvement in the system. I have every reason to believe that the police will welcome the proposals, not least because they would have that consequence. Shortening the time between the offence and the conviction and sentence may be Labour party policy, but Labour has produced no proposals that would give effect to it.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): In the 10 years I have been in the House, I have seldom heard such good sense from a Minister in a statement. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) said, I believe that we should never have abolished the practice of dealing with people in a magistrates court the day after they are charged, and that it should be reintroduced. It is not a problem for the police service: it certainly was not in my day. I believe that the police will welcome the proposal.

On either-way trials, if we can trust magistrates to decide guilt or innocence, why cannot we trust magistrates to decide whether cases are sufficiently serious to be tried by a jury in a Crown court?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend: there is much in his second point. At the moment, a number of serious offences that would undoubtedly have a considerable effect on someone's reputation are triable only summarily. Assault on a police officer is not an offence that gives rise to a right to trial by jury. The consequences of such an assault could be extremely serious, yet it is a summary only offence. Many serious offences with serious consequences for defendants do not have an automatic right to jury trial. We should weigh that in the balance when we make a final decision on the proposal.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Given the delays in the criminal justice system, would the proposals be of any assistance to Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, who, for four years, have done their utmost to see to it that those who murdered their son Stephen are brought to justice? Is that not a glaring example of where the criminal justice system is not working? In those circumstances, is it not right for a newspaper to do what it can to ensure that those whom it believes are guilty of that terrible murder four years ago are brought to justice?

Mr. Howard: I have previously placed my views on that matter on the record. The hon. Gentleman is right to imply that the proposals, which do not pretend to cure every defect in our criminal justice system, would not have had any bearing on that case.

Mr. Winnick *indicated assent.*

Mr. Howard: I am glad to see the hon. Gentleman nodding vigorously in assent to that proposition. I hope that he will nod equally vigorously in assent to my second proposition. What might have made a difference in the Lawrence case was the change that we made to the right to silence, which was not in force when that killing was committed. The police take the view that, had that change

been in force, it might have made a difference to the outcome of that investigation and that case. I hope that the hon. Gentleman has not entirely forgotten that that change was opposed root and branch by the Opposition parties and that they spoke and voted against it consistently.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the criminal fraternity does not like him very much, but that the police to whom I have talked in west Yorkshire think that he has done a superb job in giving them the tools to fight those criminals, and that the result has been that in recent years crime has been falling? Is he aware, however, that the one concern that the police have is the amount of time that it can take for cases to come to court, so the police will no doubt welcome his announcement, which will, I hope, help to speed up the process of justice?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I understand that the police organisations have welcomed the proposals. They will no doubt wish to consider them carefully, but I hope that they will achieve precisely the result that my hon. Friend identified—cutting police paperwork and form filling and enabling the police to spend more time on our streets, helping to protect the public, which is, I hope, what we all want.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Can the Secretary of State remind the House where we are up to on the provision of more secure places for serious persistent young offenders? My recollection is that extra places have been announced about three times, but none has yet materialised. The provision of more secure places is the thing that would make most difference in my constituency, where a handful of persistent young offenders cause mayhem. There is no point speeding up the system, welcome though that is, if it just puts them back on the street to cause mayhem more quickly.

Mr. Howard: The places are coming on stream all the time and we have been financing many of them. Unfortunately, in some regions, local authority social services departments are reluctant to use the secure places that are available, just as, some time ago, Labour and Liberal Democrat-controlled local authorities, including that in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, were reluctant to construct secure accommodation.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): Is not the gravest impediment to justice delays to justice itself? Does not a most gross disfigurement to justice occur when young people are held on remand in prison, sometimes for many months—with old lags and people who try to corrupt them—and ultimately are found innocent? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that his proposals will prevent such impediments to justice from taking place?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am reluctant to claim that any particular proposal or set of proposals will constitute a panacea, but taken as a whole, this package of proposals offers the prospect of substantial advance, of a substantial reduction in delay and of a substantial improvement in the system, but we shall listen carefully to everything that is said, particularly by those who work in the system, before we reach final decisions.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Very important new discretionary powers are proposed for lay magistrates, and those powers affect the liberty of the subject. In what form will guidance be given to justices on the exercise of that discretion? Will it be possible, for example, to hear applications in camera, in closed courts, in particular circumstances if sensitive matters are involved? Is the Home Secretary really convinced that the lay magistracy as composed now can take on the extra case load that will be generated by the proposals?

Mr. Howard: I believe so, if the other proposals in the package are implemented, as they will relieve many of the burdens that local magistrates suffer. I would envisage that if we proceeded to legislation, the legislation itself would identify the criteria that magistrates would take into account in deciding whether a case should be sent for trial by jury. The hon. Gentleman's proposal about the possibility of their sitting in camera when considering applications for trial by jury is a valuable one, to which we should certainly have regard when we examine the matters in detail.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton–Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): May I warmly welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's statement, which should help to accelerate criminal justice cases? Can he shed any light on the injustice of innocent people being held on bail? Will the proposals help to reduce the number of people being held on bail and if so, how much would that save the criminal justice system?

Mr. Howard: That is a very difficult estimate to make. I think that there will be such savings. The proposals mean that fewer innocent people will be likely to be held on remand. That is an outcome devoutly to be desired, and, although my hon. Friend did not mean to suggest it, not simply because of the financial savings that would accrue, but because it is important from the point of view of the liberty of the subject. If we succeed in reducing delays, that will have the consequential effects that my hon. Friend identified.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): At a time when the country is focused on miscarriages of justice, is the Home Secretary convinced that removing from defendants the right to choose a trial by jury will assist in preventing miscarriages of justice? Will it increase them or will it have very little effect?

Mr. Howard: If anything, it will prevent miscarriages of justice or reduce them. The report contains a reference by an extremely experienced magistrate, who says that she has never heard an application or representation made for trial on the ground of a blot on someone's reputation. She says that those who opt for trial by jury are experienced criminals who are playing the system, often in the hope that, for a variety of reasons, one of the witnesses in the case might not turn up and that might enable them to get an acquittal, which would be unjust. Although we must strain to ensure that no innocent people

[Mr. Howard]

are convicted, it is also an injustice if those who are guilty are acquitted. The changes may well have the overall effect of reducing injustice in our system.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): In considering the report and bringing forward proposals, will my right hon. and learned Friend avoid any policy that might lead to the separation of the consideration of juvenile cases from their sentencing? That would be complete nonsense and would lead to tremendous frustration for the victims of crime, who are not mentioned enough in this place. The police would also find it unacceptable.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. That proposal, emanating from the Labour party through the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), is so eccentric that I find it difficult to believe that the Opposition are seriously putting it forward.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Has the Home Secretary convinced us that there is a need to bring into our constitution the only demand of the Chartist movement 150 years ago that is not part of our law—the demand for annual Parliaments? Is it not extraordinary that today Opposition Members are in the unique and unnerving position of agreeing with the Home Secretary's statement? Is not that entirely because it is a last gasp statement by a death-bed Government?

Will the Home Secretary return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin)? I get precisely the same complaints from police and magistrates in my constituency, who say that there is a tiny group of young people, some of them adults, who are serious offenders, but no action can be taken to stop them committing offences. One such individual was guilty of 50 offences, but cannot be detained. According to the police and the magistrates, that is not because of problems locally, but because of difficulties emanating from Government action.

Mr. Howard: I think that the hon. Gentleman has been misinformed. I recommend that he takes the matter up with his local social services department, which should be able to make use of secure accommodation if the youngsters to whom he refers come before the courts. Sometimes they are not dealt with because of the practice of magistrates of not dealing with a defendant who has committed a number of other offences after first coming before the court. The Magistrates Association has recently issued guidance that that practice should no longer be followed. If the proposals substantially reduce delays, fewer offences will be committed between the first offence and the defendant being dealt with, which will have substantial beneficial effects.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the miscarriages of justice that most concern most of our constituents are those that involve guilty parties going free because of eccentricities, technicalities and delays in the criminal justice system? I congratulate him on applying the energy that he has so far—extremely successfully—focused mostly on serious crime to the equally worrying problems of juvenile and petty crime. I also congratulate him on his carefully thought through package—the legal aid provision, the pre-trial hearings and other measures—which will provide faster justice instead of pious generalisations.

Mr. Howard: Of course, we are all concerned about all miscarriages of justice—the guilty going free from court or the innocent being convicted. We all have to recognise that no human system of justice is likely to be infallible. I believe that the proposals will help to improve the effectiveness of our system of justice, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support.

Business of the House

4.21 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week.

MONDAY 3 MARCH—Motion on the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations.

Motions on the Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order and the Local Elections (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) (Northern Ireland) Order.

Motion on the Company Accounts (Disclosure of Directors' Emoluments) Regulations.

TUESDAY 4 MARCH—Until 7 o'clock, motions on the Scottish revenue support grant reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motion on the Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order.

Remaining stages of the Welsh Development Agency Bill.

WEDNESDAY 5 MARCH—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Until 7 o'clock, motion on the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order.

Motion on the Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order.

THURSDAY 6 MARCH—Debate on public expenditure on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 7 MARCH—The House will not be sitting.

For the following week I can, once again, give only limited information.

MONDAY 10 MARCH—Opposition Day (7th Allotted Day) (First part).

Until 7 o'clock there will be a debate on an Opposition motion in the names of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru. Subject to be announced.

That will be followed by Government business.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 5 March there will be a debate on the Court of Auditors reports in European Standing Committee B.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[Wednesday 5 March:

European Standing Committee B—European Community Documents: (a) OJ C340, Court of Auditors' Report for 1995; (b) OJ C395, Court of Auditors' Statement of Assurance for 1995; (c) OJ C395, Court of Auditors' Statement of Assurance for 1995: European Development Funds.

Relevant European Legislation Committee Reports: (a) and (b) HC 36-xii (1996-97); (c) HC 36-xiv (1996-97)

Tuesday 4 March:

The Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1997; The Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1997; The Special Grant Report (Scotland) on Supplementary Mismatch Scheme Grant for 1997-98. The Special Grant Report (Scotland) on grant in aid of building works at Dunblane primary school and grant in aid of local authority revenue costs resulting from the Dunblane tragedy.]

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I thank the Leader of the House for that statement. I note that we are to have what I might call yet another Government Supply day next Thursday.

Before asking the Leader of the House about one or two issues that I think should be included in next week's business, I should like to ask him about the business scheduled for Monday. Hon. Members will have seen below the line on the Order Paper several orders relating to the Representation of the People Acts and amendments thereto. Only two of those are scheduled for approval by the House next Monday. Do the Government intend to bring forward the other orders? I am particularly interested in the amendment—an agreed amendment, to the best of my knowledge—to close some of the loopholes and abuses in the absent voting procedures. That important issue is relevant to the democracy of our country. Why is the package not being taken together? My second question on that is: will it be dealt with before the election? It is important, and it requires the approval of the House.

Will the Leader of the House seek to make time in what is clearly a slack period for a debate on the privatisation of the Building Research Establishment—before it is privatised?

Another point, which has been raised repeatedly in the past few months, relates to the mystical building societies Bill. Where is it? Are we going to see it? The Leader of the House is well aware that the Opposition are prepared to facilitate the agreed legislation, for which the industry is desperate. There is clearly a hole in the Government's programme and we would like to know whether that Bill will be put into it.

I should also like to ask the Leader of the House about the non-publication of the report of the inquiry into the Sea Empress disaster, which occurred well over a year ago. Is it to be assumed that the report will not be available before the election? We know that the salvage operation was bungled, leaving 72,000 tonnes of oil in the waters; that, as every television viewer saw for days on end, Ministers showed no interest in intervening even though they had the power to do so; and that the third heavy tug on the western approaches recommended in the Donaldson report was not in place due to the Government's penny pinching.

Answers in the other place in the past few days have indicated that the report was on target for publication in February—yet, in two days' time, it will be March. The implication of the delay is that the Government intend not to let the report see the light of day before the election. Frankly, that is not good enough. It looks as though we can claim legitimately that there has been a cover-up. Will the Leader of the House comment on that and look into the matter?

May I raise the need for a debate and/or statement by the Secretary of State for Defence following the proceedings in the Select Committee on Defence yesterday? He appears not to have shown the slightest interest in the issue of chemicals used in the Gulf war and the effect on our troops. The Minister of State for the Armed Forces is an honourable man, and, contrary to

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

what has been implied in some of the press reports today, he is not a liar. He has, however, proved himself less than an alert Minister. As everybody knows, and contrary to what the Prime Minister said today, it is a matter of public record that, in October 1995—

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): Is this something to do with next week's business?

Mr. Rooker: Yes, next week's business. We need a debate and a statement on the issue. In October 1995, local purchase of organophosphates was referred to in Ministers' civil service briefings in preparation for questions in the House—yet that was never disclosed. How can a Minister dismiss briefings in October 1995 and then claim that Ministers were given clear written advice from the civil service on the issue only in September 1996? The issue is important and there is time for it to be raised on the Floor of the House before Parliament is dissolved.

The Leader of the House will recall that, on 10 December last year, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said that, due to his previous role as a Minister responsible for farming,

"I am extraordinarily aware of the question of OPs".—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1996; Vol. 287, c. 132.]

None the less, he ignored his own civil service brief. What was the Secretary of State doing? Was he being briefed? If not, was he asking the advisers in the Ministry any questions? If there is a contradiction between a brief and a draft answer, surely Ministers should be asking questions about it. Should not a Minister keep his officials on their toes and be critical at all times? It appears that that has not been so. Although it is clear that we have a sloppy, lazy Minister, who is falling short of his duties, the Secretary of State should carry the can and make a statement to the House on the issue next week.

Mr. Newton: To take the last point first, for a moment I thought that the hon. Gentleman was virtually alone and unaided in initiating a debate on the matter. I am grateful for him at least acknowledging that my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) is an honourable Member and Minister. At the same time, I should make it clear that I do not for one moment accept the rest of his rather abusive remarks about my hon. Friend, and indeed my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

I think that my hon. Friend has behaved absolutely properly in making a statement to the House last December—as soon as he reasonably could once new information became available—and in giving extensive evidence yesterday on those matters, quite openly and straightforwardly, to the Defence Select Committee. Beyond that, I will not attempt to add to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on those points during Prime Minister's Question Time. However, I certainly know of no plans for a statement of the type requested by the hon. Gentleman.

As for the Sea Empress, I must again reject any suggestion that some type of cover-up—to use the hon. Gentleman's rather overheated language—is occurring. I will of course bring the points that he has made to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, who has always made it absolutely clear that he wants the matters to be pursued as vigorously, but also as thoroughly, as the incident requires.

I am not quite sure whether the hon. Gentleman will be aware—although I imagine that he has been told—that a good deal of discussion has taken place in the usual channels on the building societies Bill. I can tell him that we do intend to introduce the Bill—on the basis that the Opposition will deliver on the assurance which he has now publicly given on the Floor of the House that they will fully co-operate in passing it speedily, which clearly is the only way in which it can be passed at this time in the Session. I am grateful to him for giving that assurance, and I hope that he will make every endeavour to ensure that they—I was about to say "deliver", but the implication of that word would be offensive, and I certainly do not mean to be offensive in any way. I am grateful for his comments.

On privatisation of the Building Research Establishment, I will draw the hon. Gentleman's request to the attention of my hon. and right hon. Friends. However, I cannot now promise a debate of the type that he suggested.

I will come back to the hon. Gentleman on his point on the various orders.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the enormous confusion among the public about the future of grammar schools? Will he therefore make early arrangements for a debate centred on the future of those schools, particularly because of the contradictory remarks made by Opposition Members? He will be aware that, 16 months ago, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that grammar schools would be abolished. Matters have apparently changed since then—but we should like to test that. Will he provide us with an opportunity to discuss the issue, either in Government time or—preferably, as it is their fault—in Opposition time, so that we can clear it up?

Madam Speaker: Order. Before we proceed any further, I remind hon. Members that this is not speech time. I do not want to hear speeches, I want to hear direct questions on what will happen next week. I know that the Leader of the House will be good enough to speed up, because I want to move on to other business.

Mr. Newton: One thing that is not within my power is to make commitments on the use of Opposition time. Perhaps the best thing for me to tell my hon. Friend is that those matters are closely related to a piece of legislation currently under discussion in another place. When that legislation returns to the House, there should be opportunities of the type that he seeks.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Has the Leader of the House had a chance to study early-day motion 584?

[That this House records the remarks of the Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Professor Joseph Rotblat, that developments in cloning and genetics 'may result in mass destruction'; welcomes the decision of the White House to urgently reassess the ethical and legal implications of the cloning of a sheep at the Roslin Institute, Edinburgh; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to suspend

further experiments involving cloning and transgenic animals, to initiate a wide-ranging public debate and to appoint additional representatives to the Genetics Commission who reflect traditional concerns about the sanctity of human life, who are opposed to the development of eugenics, and who disagree with the Nuffield Council's view that 'species boundaries, in any case, are not inviolable.'.]

The motion—which I tabled, and which is supported by representatives of five of the political parties in the House—calls for a ban on the cloning experiments that have been conducted in Scotland. Will he arrange for a debate next week on that important subject, and for a review of the make-up of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission, so that it is more broadly based and contains dissenting views?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that today my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology spoke on both the scientific implications and the effective ethical safeguards that are already in place. However, I am sure that my hon. Friend, and my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Health, will carefully consider the hon. Gentleman's comments.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Will my right hon. Friend consider granting a debate combining the subjects of cloning and grammar schools? Some extravagant claims have been made that the Government's policy on grammar schools has been cloned by the Opposition parties, but that is completely untrue, and the experiments have been fraudulent.

Mr. Newton: From what I hear, the clones appear only in parts of the country where a by-election is taking place.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the Leader of the House have a word with the Secretary of State for Transport about the assets of London Transport? Yesterday, we were told that the value of those major assets was unknown and that no reserve price had been suggested for their sale. Perhaps the Leader of the House could draw the attention of the Department of Transport to the list of assets of the London regional transport system, which gave a value of £13 billion for infrastructure, property, rolling stock, equipment and conservation, plus a sum of £29 million per annum for property letting. I would like to know what the Government are playing at.

Mr. Newton: Unless I am to make a speech—which I do not intend to do, in response to your strictures, Madam Speaker—in reply to what sounded suspiciously close to being a speech, my proper course is to draw the hon. Lady's attention to the Secretary of State for Transport's presence in the House to answer questions on Monday 10 March.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Government have accepted the recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee on the working of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1989. The Committee suggested that although people thought the Act had been implemented too hastily, it was successful and worked, but the time had come to introduce some flexibility. I understand that the Bill sponsored by my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), which has come from the House of Lords, is to be debated in the Chamber and that, with the agreement of both sides, it would reach the Statute Book before the rising of Parliament. Can my right hon. Friend tell the House when the dangerous dogs issue will be debated and the legislation implemented?

Mr. Newton: I cannot give an immediate undertaking about when the issue will be debated. The Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill is listed for discussion tomorrow, but it is well down a long list and, in all honesty, it is unlikely to be debated. I hope, however, that the House will agree that the Bill should proceed, so that it can be amended in a way that would reflect the Home Affairs Committee's recommendations.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Forgive my curiosity, but, in his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), the Leader of the House used the phrase "new information" about organophosphates. What new information? Next week, may we have a statement on the increasing practice—which being old-fashioned, I find distasteful—of Ministers blaming civil servants, despite the doctrine of ministerial responsibility? May we have a statement on that doctrine, which seems to have vanished out of the window?

Mr. Newton: I do not for a moment accept the hon. Gentleman's last remarks. As it happens and as he will know, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has been in discussion with Opposition Front Benchers about issues arising from ministerial accountability to the House. I do not recall making any reference to new information—

Mr. Rooker: You did.

Mr. Newton: In that case, I shall read what I said and if I feel that I should correct something or come back to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), I shall.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Will my right hon. Friend provide some time next week to discuss the process of adoption in the United Kingdom? The social services inspectorate report, published in December, highlighted the long wait of up to three years that children in care sometimes have. I know that my right hon. Friend may refer me to a Wednesday morning debate, but he will know how difficult it is to obtain one.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that the occupant of the Chair will have heard my hon. Friend's comments about Wednesday morning debates. She is right to think that I would refer her in that direction, because I could not promise Government time for such a debate in the near future.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Royal British Legion is currently seeking judicial review of the proposed cuts affecting war veterans with hearing loss? Will he ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to drop those dreadful cuts and to come to the House and apologise to war veterans? They should have our gratitude, not cuts in their benefits.

Mr. Newton: A meeting was arranged a considerable time before the Royal British Legion's recent

[Mr. Newton]

announcement, so perhaps I could simply make the point that the Minister of State, my right hon. and noble Friend Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, is due to meet the Legion and its advisers on 12 March to discuss those matters.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend initiate a debate early next week on the role of local authorities in the planning process, so that the Minister replying to it can explain how the codes of practice on development plans can be adhered to? That is an issue of the greatest importance not only nationally but to my constituents, who face the problems associated with a socialist borough council that seeks to build social housing on recreation grounds and other green-chain areas.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will have noticed that my ever-assiduous hon. Friend the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency has manifestly been here to note his remarks—and all Environment Ministers will be here to answer questions next Tuesday.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 563, on the new electoral registers?

[*That this House is amazed that, although new electoral registers came into operation on 16th February and that this is an age of fax machines, computers and other forms of modern technology, the Office of National Statistics is unable to publish, until April, even in a provisional form, the total number of people who are on the new electoral registers in England and Wales; and further contrasts this with the touch-button technology used by the National Lottery.*]

The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that for some time I have been trying to discover the number of people on the electoral registers that have been in force since 16 February. The Northern Ireland figures have been provided, but the wrong figures, a year out of date, have been given for Scotland, and as for the figures for England and Wales, all that has happened is that the date initially offered for providing them—April—has been moved forward by the Prime Minister to late March. Can we not have those figures now? Is there not a great contrast between that arrangement and the national lottery, for which one can discover within two hours how much money has been lodged and how many winners there are? Why can we not know how many people are registered in each constituency? It would be an easy matter to give the House that information, so that it could be used in the future.

Mr. Newton: I am not sure that I see an easy analogy between the electoral register and the national lottery. Clearly the Office for National Statistics has before it a substantial task, which takes time. As the hon. Gentleman has already said, every effort is being made to provide the information that he wants as soon as possible.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): May I again try to persuade my right hon. Friend to give time for a debate on standards in education, in which the Government's firm principles on standards in schools could be restated? I imagine that he is aware that this morning the Labour party spokesman on education made some sort of statement on standards in, of all places, Islington. He will surely recognise that such a debate would allow the Government to state again their principles on standards, as well as allowing the Opposition to explain why they consistently fail to deliver standards in education, despite the fact that the Labour party controls so many education authorities. That is where education is failing in this country, and it is not through any efforts of the Government.

Mr. Newton: I need hardly say that I think that my hon. Friend has made a good point, with which I have great sympathy. However, I am afraid that that does not enable me to promise such a debate, although there will be opportunities to discuss such matters when the Education Bill returns here from another place.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to an early-day motion—I believe the number is 329—which has now been signed by 224 members? In fact, the number is 378.

[*That this House welcomes the joint appeal by the church councils of both parts of the Sudan entitled 'Here We Stand United in Action for Peace' noting particularly their appeal for international help to oversee a cease-fire and a referendum; and encourages the Foreign Secretary to respond positively.*]

Is there a possibility that the Foreign Secretary will come to the House next week to respond to that early-day motion?

I realise that a fair bit of Northern Ireland business has been arranged for next week, but will the right hon. Gentleman be tabling a motion extending the powers of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee?

Mr. Newton: If I heard right, the hon. Gentleman referred to early-day motion 329, which appears to be about digital television set-top boxes. I would not immediately have seen those as a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. *[Interruption.]* I am not sure whether my communication system is up to moving from one early-day motion to another so quickly. However, I shall consider what the hon. Gentleman has said, and the relevant early-day motion, as soon as I can.

As for the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will write to the Northern Ireland party leaders this afternoon saying that, following consultation, the Government intend to bring before the House a motion amending the Standing Orders of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): When can we have a debate on London? The right hon. Gentleman has been asked before about policing in London, but we could have a debate on London as a whole. We could discuss the absurd proposal to flog off, or rather give away, London Underground, and also the real differences between the two parties over the plans for London. We could discuss a strategic authority for London, as well as an elected mayor. We need that debate. May we have it before the general election, whenever that will be?

Mr. Newton: That all sounds most interesting, but I cannot add to what I have said in previous weeks.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): May we have an early debate on the problems facing small businesses, especially

small bookshops? Is the Leader of the House aware that when I popped into Books Etc at lunchtime to try to buy a copy of "Sleaze—the corruption of Parliament", I was told that all copies had been removed from the bookshelves because solicitors acting for the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) had threatened the proprietors of the shop? Does that not raise wider questions? In the run-up to the general election such a book, detailing the hon. Gentleman's activities, should be widely available. Freedom of information in this crucial period is most important.

Mr. Newton: May I make two points? First, as I have said on several comparable occasions recently, I am Chairman of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, and various things before that Committee are not unrelated to what the hon. Gentleman has said. My second point, which I hope the hon. Gentleman will consider, is that he was again raising on the Floor of the House a matter already under consideration in the proper way. Frankly, I do not think that he should do that.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): Has the Leader of the House seen the news reports this morning telling us that MTL, the company that has been offered the Regional Railways North East franchise, is planning to get rid of 1,200 of its staff—40 per cent. of the work force—many of whom live in my constituency? That is a matter of intense public interest, because MTL's Regional Railways operation does not make a profit; it is a loss-making business, subsidised by the taxpayer to the tune of £1,200 million under the franchising agreement.

The House needs reassurance that after the cuts the public will still get the railway services for which the taxpayer is paying. Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Transport to meet the company as a matter of urgency, and then to make a statement to the House before the franchise agreement is finally signed, so that we know whether taxpayers' money will be used for the purposes for which it was voted?

Mr. Newton: I shall of course convey that request to my right hon. Friend, but the hon. Gentleman might also mention the facts that the firm has guaranteed existing train mileage and promised service improvement, will introduce new rolling stock and is committed to deliver a better quality service.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): The Leader of the House may recall that I have raised on an earlier occasion my concern, expressed in early-day motion 404, about the inquest procedures relating to the death of my constituent, Kenneth Severin.

[*That this House believes that it is in the interests of justice for all parties to go into an inquest hearing with the same amount of information; notes that there is no formal procedure for disclosure in inquest cases; draws attention to the Annual Report of the Police Complaints Authority 1995-96 which expressed concern that at some inquests those representing the police may have material not available to the representatives of other interested parties, particularly the family of the deceased, thus giving a strong impression of injustice; notes that the former Chief Inspector of Prisons, Judge Tumim has made similar comments expressing the view that it is in the interests of justice for all parties to go into an inquest hearing with the same amount of information; draws attention to the difficulties faced by the family and representatives of Kenneth Severin who died in suspicious circumstances in HM Prison Belmarsh; and calls upon the Home Secretary and the Lord Chancellor to review the rights of the deceased person's family in such cases and to institute rights of disclosure as recommended by the Police Complaints Authority.*]

I have now had the opportunity to read the coroner's recommendations in that case, and to see other papers concerning Kenneth Severin's treatment. In view of those recommendations, would it be possible to have an early debate not only on the circumstances of Kenneth Severin's death but on the situation of all persons in need of psychiatric care who, through failures in the system, find themselves in prison and meet a brutal end? That would not only be to the benefit of Kenneth Severin's family, but might help to prevent more such tragedies.

Mr. Newton: I immediately acknowledge the importance of the general issue that the hon. Gentleman has raised in connection with that case, although I am not in a position to comment on the particular case. I am sure that his request will be carefully weighed by the Ministers concerned. I shall keep it in mind, but the hon. Gentleman will understand that I cannot immediately promise a debate.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): Can the Leader of the House tell us when the report on the Sea Empress disaster will be published? It is now more than a year since the disaster. The Government refused to set up a public inquiry, and instead set up an internal Department of Transport inquiry. It seems that they are now delaying the publication of the report. Is that not a shabby way to treat the people of Pembrokeshire and Wales and the well-being of the environment?

Mr. Newton: I know of no basis for the kind of language used by the hon. Gentleman, which matches the phrase "cover-up" used by his hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). I cannot add to what I said earlier. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will look carefully at the hon. Gentleman's comments, as it is the wish of us all that this matter is properly investigated and that the facts are established at the earliest possible moment.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Has the Leader of the House anything to add to his statement of some months ago about the Easter recess? I hear many rumours—most, I think, emanating from Conservative Members—which suggest that he is likely to alter the date so that Members will have the week before Easter for electioneering purposes in their constituencies and that we will be brought back to dissolve Parliament in the time that he had originally announced for the Easter recess. Is he able to make a further comment on the recess? If not, when will he be able to do so?

Mr. Newton: First, I do not see how I can be accused of making an alteration to a date that I have never announced. I have said nothing about the Easter recess. All that I can say is that it will be in the vicinity of Easter.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When can we debate the extraordinary behaviour of this dying Government and

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

their announcement of the privatisation of London Underground: a scheme for which they do not know the cost, as they do not know the value of London Underground; a scheme for which they have three separate ideas for privatisation on which they have not yet decided; and a scheme that is sensible in investment terms only if there is an absolute guarantee that the Conservatives will win the general election?

We should compare the Government's reaction on that matter—on which they have moved with the speed of a cobra—with the way in which they have behaved with the report on the Sea Empress. The report is ready, it has been printed and—we know—it is available. The Leader of the House says that he has not been properly informed, but if he wishes to absolve himself from the accusation of taking part in a cover-up will he guarantee that, next week, he will tell us when the report is to be published?

Mr. Newton: What I can tell the hon. Gentleman, and what I have told one or two others, is that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport—to whom I have referred several times—will be here to answer questions on 10 March. I shall be a little unfriendly and say that I am tempted to observe that I wish the hon. Gentleman would give me the name of his scriptwriter so that I can make sure that I never use him.

Building Research Establishment

4.52 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

the Government's handling of the privatisation of the Building Research Establishment.

I have written to you about this matter, Madam Speaker.

Over the past few weeks, it has become clear from a number of sources—including replies to parliamentary questions—that the two short-listed bidders to acquire the BRE were not competing fairly on a level playing field. This has clearly prejudiced the prospects of the external bidder and calls into question the validity of the Government's decision to offer the BRE for sale to the in-house bid team.

Even more serious in my view is the evidence that the House has been misled on this issue. In a reply on 18 February, the Minister stated that his Department had received no representations about the failure to maintain a level playing field between the two short-listed bidders. This is simply not correct. On 15 January this year, I wrote to the permanent secretary in the Department to express serious reservations about the way in which the BRE's privatisation was being handled and to highlight concerns that the level playing field between the different bidders had been undermined. The claim that the Department had received no representations on the issue is simply not believable.

Secondly, the Minister claimed in a reply on 13 February that no documentation relating to the future BRE group was made available to any bidder. The future BRE group was an internal review group set up by the BRE at the end of 1995 to examine a range of issues relating to the organisation's income, efficiency and expenditure, and its findings clearly would be of considerable interest and relevance to potential bidders. In a subsequent parliamentary answer on 24 February, the Minister revealed that five members of the future BRE group were also members of the in-house bid team, and so would have had access to this documentation. This once again indicates the absence of a proper level playing field between the two short-listed bidders. There is also a clear contradiction between the answers given by the Minister on 13 and 24 February.

I believe that this involves a serious failure to give full and straightforward answers to parliamentary questions. Accordingly, I wrote to the Minister on 25 February asking for an explanation and an early response. I also asked for an undertaking that, in the meantime, no action would be taken to progress the sale. This letter was faxed to the Minister's office early on Tuesday morning. To date, I have received no reply. I now learn that the Government are hoping to complete the sale of the BRE to the in-house bid team by the end of the month. That means that it is essential for this issue to be debated immediately if these matters are to be considered by the House before contracts are signed—hence my request for an early debate.

Madam Speaker, I believe that these issues fall four-square within the provisions of Standing Order No. 20. This is a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, and I hope that you will give my request sympathetic consideration.

Madam Speaker: I have listened most carefully to the hon. Gentleman and I have to give my decision without stating any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider the matter that he has raised to be appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20, and I cannot therefore submit his application to the House.

Point of Order

4.55 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Normally I recognise that a slip of the tongue is a relatively trivial matter, and I would certainly not raise it on a point of order. But when, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), the Leader of the House used the words "new information" it was crucial not only to the then argument, but to something else. Since 1993, my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and a number of the rest of us have endlessly asked parliamentary questions of a precise detailed nature on what has now come to be known as Gulf war syndrome. It is not as if this subject was neglected by the House of Commons—it was not. There was a cascade of questions on the matter. In these circumstances, simply to say that there is "new information" that justifies the behaviour of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces is not satisfactory. I would ask that you give the Leader of the House the opportunity either to correct himself or to say what he meant.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. With your permission, I would like to respond briefly in case there was any misunderstanding—although I am not sure that there should have been. As I understand it, Ministry of Defence Ministers were only told on 25 September last year that OP pesticides had been more widely used than previously stated. I believe that they then made that clear as soon as they could.

Welsh Affairs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

4.57 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): The 12 months since we last debated Welsh affairs in the House have been 12 months of success for Wales—12 months of challenges accepted and met, and 12 months of increasing prosperity and opportunity for the people of Wales. In the past year, we have seen our policies and reforms continue to bear fruit and bring benefits. I want to mention some of our achievements and to set out how we intend to maintain the momentum to take a successful and prosperous Wales into the next century.

I have concentrated over the past two years on three themes above all—the economy, education and the environment. The three must be linked in people's minds and actions if we are to make sustained progress in a modern society. Taken together, they represent opportunity—the opportunity of learning, of gaining qualifications, of mastering a skill, of gaining a job, of continuity for communities, of a future for young people, and the opportunity to live in a healthy environment and to enjoy the variety of spectacular scenery that Wales has to offer.

Unemployment in Wales has fallen by more than 9,000 in the past three months alone, and last year we won inward investment promising 15,000 jobs: that is 15,000 opportunities for individuals, and more opportunities again for entrepreneurs and companies to capitalise on that success. Standards have risen in our schools, so that young people in Wales can be properly equipped to take those opportunities, and we are training more apprentices and technicians to take their places in this new industrial revolution.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): That is excellent news about the 15,000 new jobs, which possibly makes this a record year, but does the Secretary of State accept that most of those posts will not be filled until after the general election, and that most of the employers are well aware of Labour's 20-point lead in the opinion polls? That makes it absolutely clear that all those employers, both existing and new, have no fears about anything that an incoming Labour Government might do.

Mr. Hague: Most employers are far too wise to presume on the outcome of an election being determined by opinion polls, as the hon. Gentleman seems to do. If many of those employers were aware—as some of them are—of the many regulations imposed on businesses on the continent of Europe, they would have a different view on where to expand their activities.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The LG investment, as the Secretary of State knows, will generate the need for substantial additional housing, and there is a major question whether that will be clustered in one area, Coedkernew, or spread wider afield. The Secretary of State for the Environment has published a think piece on where people will live in England, because of the growing number of households and other factors. Can the right hon. Gentleman see a case, given that our problems are similar, for a similar think piece in respect of Wales?

Mr. Hague: I do not necessarily accept what the hon. Gentleman said about there being a great need for new housing because of the LG development. In the main, I should like the benefits of the project to go to people living where they live today. I cannot prejudge any decision that I would make on alterations to structure plans, but that is my general approach, and I believe that it will command the support of hon. Members of all parties.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I am puzzled by one thing: the United Kingdom has won 78 Nobel prizes for science this century, and Korea has won none, so why are we spending large sums of money to buy scientific jobs from Korea?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman knows that the project will bring vast benefits to his constituency. The vast majority of the money that brings the jobs is coming from LG, from Korea, not from the United Kingdom. I think that it is right in some areas to give assistance to companies, wherever they come from—Korea or Wales, home-grown or overseas—to encourage jobs to go to those areas. The hon. Gentleman's constituency has been one of the principal beneficiaries of that policy, and he should not be in the business of criticising that.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hague: Yes, but this will be a very long speech if I give way all the time.

Mr. Richards: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Does he understand the Labour party's proposals on employment? On the one hand, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) says that a Labour Government would spend about £3 billion subsidising employers to employ approximately 250,000 people, on the basis that reducing employment costs increases the numbers employed; on the other, he wants to introduce a minimum wage, which would increase costs and, surely, reduce the number employed. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is totally illogical?

Mr. Hague: Yes. My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. There is no question but that Labour's policies would reduce employment, and they would certainly reduce employment opportunities for the future in Wales. The minimum wage would damage those opportunities, as the deputy leader of the Labour party has acknowledged in the past, as would the adoption of the social chapter.

I briefly mentioned education and industry. We are working, in addition, to sustain rural communities and to maintain a living, working countryside, bringing together agriculture, industry and tourism in a way that preserves a way of life, a culture, and the countryside itself.

We have succeeded in all that, not by looking inward and believing that our economy or our environment begins and ends at the Welsh border, but because we are part of one of the strongest and most flexible economies

in Europe; because we look outward for investment and ideas; and because we are prepared to compete at an international level.

There is still the challenge of spreading opportunity and prosperity throughout Wales, and I shall outline in a moment some measures to achieve that; but before I go into detail on those and other matters, let me refer to one more piece of recent good news, one more opportunity for Wales.

When the European Council meets in Cardiff next year, we intend to make sure that it meets in an even more prosperous and dynamic Wales, a Wales that is fully part of a prosperous and dynamic United Kingdom with a strong, self-confident message about itself for the rest of Europe and a strong, clear voice in the decision-making processes of the United Kingdom, not a Wales distracted and weakened by a prolonged and bitter debate about yet another tier of government. I want not the devolution of despair but the devolution and extension of opportunity for more and more people in Wales.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, if there is a referendum after the general election, with a real choice for the people of Wales, the Conservative party will not oppose it? If he opposes such a referendum, is it because he believes that the general election gives a mandate to an incoming Government to set up an assembly?

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I have said clearly that we would respect the outcome of a referendum and that people would be landed with the consequences of such a referendum for the foreseeable future. However, I have grave misgivings about the idea of a pre-legislative referendum. That is a misuse of referendums and creates a situation in which the Government of the day either say that they want the electorate to give approval before seeing the details or say subsequently to Parliament that a draft Bill has been approved in a referendum and Parliament must pass it whether it likes it or not. That is not easily combined with the parliamentary democracy that we cherish.

We are threatened with the misuse of a referendum by a Government with an overmighty attitude. If the disaster of a Labour Government were to happen, we would no doubt have to return to the subject. I intend that the Government of the United Kingdom after the general election will be one who will not go down that road of the ludicrous distraction of constitutional change but will continue to bring jobs and prosperity to Wales.

That prosperity is the subject to which I now want to return. Our overriding objective for the UK economy is to promote sustained economic growth and rising prosperity. The two cornerstones of our policies are permanently low inflation and sound public finances.

We have the fundamentals well in hand: inflation is well under control and stable—the best performance for nearly 50 years—interest rates remain low; public finance is under tight control; and the public sector borrowing requirement is forecast to fall further in the years to come. Independent observers, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, say that the UK economy is now more flexible, competitive and resistant to inflation.

Wales has benefited enormously from those policies. We have more than 300 overseas-owned companies operating out of almost 380 plants and employing more than 75,000 people. Wales is undergoing a new industrial revolution, transformed from a country heavily dependent on traditional industries to a modern and diverse growing economy.

Let us consider some of the facts. Since 1982, manufacturing productivity in Wales has been above the UK average—9 per cent. above in 1994. Provisional figures for 1995 show that Wales has a sturdy 14.6 per cent. advantage over the rest of the UK.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Given those figures, is it not all the more dismaying that Bluebird Toys decided to close its Merthyr plant? It had been part of the diversification process and had received fantastic assistance from the Welsh Office, local authorities and the Welsh Development Agency. Even at this twelfth hour, I wonder whether collectively we could persuade the company to continue to locate some of its production there, so that it does not become an import-only toy company.

Mr. Hague: I share the hon. Gentleman's disappointment about that recent news, which, I think, involves 88 jobs. I recently wrote to him about the matter. Both the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), and I have written to the company in the past to make it clear that we stand ready to offer any assistance that we can give. That offer stands, and if there is any other way in which we can pursue the matter, I am ready to do so. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that, although we regret that news, there has been much other good news for employment in his constituency in recent months.

Since 1979, the number of manufacturing businesses in Wales has increased by about 46 per cent. Indigenous companies work alongside inward investors. Welsh steel making has improved beyond recognition to become the most efficient in Europe. The number of people in employment in Wales has risen over the past decade by 95,000. Manufacturing industry has for a long time been a particular success story in Wales. We are the only region of Great Britain—

Mr. Wigley: Country.

Mr. Hague: We are the only part, the only country, of Great Britain whose manufacturing employment has increased over the past decade. Unemployment in Wales continues to fall: it fell by 9,200 over the past three months. Long-term unemployment dropped by 8 per cent. in the year to January 1997.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in the Vale of Glamorgan since I was elected in 1992, there has been approximately £1.6 billion of inward investment and several hundred new jobs have been created? Would he care to comment on the implications for my constituents of the social chapter, a minimum wage and the other job-destroying measures proposed by the Opposition?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend rightly mentions his constituency, which has been one of the principal beneficiaries of the growth and success of home-grown companies, as well as of inward investors. It is an outstanding example of the growing success of Wales.

[Mr. Hague]

He is right: the adoption of a minimum wage and the social chapter would gravely inhibit employment opportunities in Wales. There is no question about that. Jacques Delors himself thought that our opt-out from the social chapter would make the United Kingdom a paradise for investment. That is exactly what it has done. Adoption of the social chapter would destroy that paradise.

Mr. Flynn: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: No, I shall make some progress. I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once.

Business surveys published today show that firms in Wales remain optimistic for the coming year. Domestic orders and output are strong, with firms expecting growth to continue. Prospects for employment are good, and strong growth in investment in plant and machinery is expected. Professional forecasters are bullish about the prospects for Wales. Cambridge Econometrics expects the Welsh economy to grow faster this year than that of the United Kingdom as a whole.

Yesterday's newspaper headline, that south-east Wales is the "Best place in the UK to get a job", would have been unimaginable a few years ago. It is a measure of the achievement of the Government and of countless businesses in transforming the prospects for Wales. If south-east Wales is the best place in Britain to get a job, it follows that it must be one of the best places in Europe to get a job. Now our ambition is that, in the next few years, the whole of Wales will be the best place in Europe to get a job. We know that there is more to do. We will continue to help to create jobs across a broad range of businesses. We want stronger services to complement manufacturing with even more financial services and research and technology-based businesses in Wales.

The Welsh Development Agency has made a significant contribution to the Welsh success story. It has met, and exceeded, its targets. Its activities assist economic growth and job creation throughout Wales. In the past year alone, it has played its part in attracting £2.5 billion of investment through 150 projects. I want the agency to build on its successes and to consolidate its achievements by ensuring that the benefits are spread throughout Wales.

In response to the challenge of attracting more investment to areas outside the more traditionally favoured south-east and north-east of Wales, for the coming financial year I shall require at least 50 per cent. of the jobs safeguarded or created by the agency to be outside the eastern M4 and A55 corridors. That is a major increase from the current 20 per cent. target, which relates solely to capital and inward investment programmes. The 50 per cent. target would relate to all the agency's programmes.

The Development Board for Rural Wales will similarly concentrate at least 50 per cent. of its programme expenditure on its western areas, demonstrating the commitment to job creation in those areas, where unemployment is, on average, higher than in south-east or north-east Wales. Of the 12,500 jobs, 8,000 should come from inward investment, of which at least 3,000 should be from new, overseas projects. With the inward investment jobs target, I shall be looking for the agency to secure at least £400 million in associated planned investment.

The land reclamation programme of the agency will continue. It is working on several large schemes; the reclamation of some 1,400 ha—nearly 3,500 acres—will be physically progressing on site. Over the next two years, the agency has given a commitment that it will complete the reclamation of schemes totalling 750 million ha, or 1,850 acres. The target of completing the reclamation of 200 ha during the coming financial year is the first phase of that two-year commitment.

The success of Wales in attracting inward investment and consistently achieving 10 to 20 per cent. of all inward investment brought to our shores is envied by many of our competitors. The competition is fierce and sophisticated; it comes from elsewhere in the United Kingdom, from the United States and from the Asia-Pacific region. To remain successful, we must stay sharp and react to the needs of today's multinationals, as we have with LG, Sony, Ford, Newport Wafer-Fab and a host of others.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: I shall be very generous and give way to the hon. Gentleman a second time.

Mr. Anderson: I congratulate the Secretary of State on his belated recognition of the growing imbalance between the more-favoured and less-favoured areas of Wales. If we are to build on his wish, we need resources. He knows of the WDA's complaint that, because of existing commitments, there is no headroom left to carry out the policies that he now favours. How will he deal with that?

Mr. Hague: We debated this matter in the House a couple of weeks ago. The WDA has many commitments, but that does not mean that its entire budget is committed. The hon. Gentleman knows that I increased this year, will increase again next year and plan to increase again the year after that, the amount of Government grant in aid that goes to the WDA. Some hon. Members have said that they would like to provide more resources for the WDA, but given that they have also said that they are committed to the total spending plans of the Welsh Office, they need to say where they would find the money and what reductions would be made to finance it—a subject to which I shall return.

Only this week, Ford announced another investment in Wales: £25 million will be spent at Swansea to make parts for the next generation of Escort cars. That is a demonstration of faith in the Welsh work force and secures the plant there for the immediate future. Today, there was an announcement by another long-standing investor in Wales: Hoya will spend more than £10 million at its Wrexham lens plant and more than double its work force of 100. I met the company president on a recent investment mission to Japan. The quality of the work force, and the company's positive experience in Wales, led to that expansion.

As Hoya and Ford have discovered, we offer a dedicated, reliable and flexible work force; good industrial relations; competitive overhead costs, made possible by low non-wage costs; good transportation links to markets in the United Kingdom and further afield; continued investment in quality infrastructure, such as the

new A465 link and our private finance initiative schemes including the A55 across Anglesey, which is now the highest priority in our roads programme; a positive approach by those of us involved in economic development; and a stable economy with low interest and inflation rates and good prospects for growth.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): The Secretary of State mentions an important issue in my constituency. He will know that the Under–Secretary, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), attended a meeting in Anglesey a few days ago to discuss the matter, and it was put to him that, under the programme, even under the private finance initiative scheme, there should be a much earlier start than autumn 1998. Will the right hon. Gentleman announce today that he is looking seriously at that proposal?

Mr. Hague: I shall certainly consider any means of bringing forward the project, although the process of ensuring that the PFI scheme can go ahead and that the right bidder has been selected will take some time. I fully intend, however, that that road will remain the highest priority in our roads programme and I certainly intend—and continue to believe strongly—that we shall meet the target date for completing the road that was set even before PFI was considered for it. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reassure his constituents on that.

Wales is now in an enviable position and we have a golden opportunity. We must now rise to the challenge of making sure that as many as possible of the spin-off jobs from major investments go to Welsh people working in Welsh companies spread throughout Wales. That is the task ahead.

Mr. Wigley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: I should make a little progress, or other hon. Members will not have time to speak in the debate.

To rise to the challenge and take that opportunity, our young people must be better educated and more highly skilled than ever before.

In Wales, we have created an internationally renowned work force, responsive to change and with the initiative and skills to meet the demands of leading-edge and high-technology businesses. That is why we recently updated our framework for post-school training and education. A few weeks ago, I published a document entitled "People and Prosperity: Building on Success", which reports on what we have done to develop a competitive skills base and outlines the steps that we now need to take to build on that success. Those steps include opportunities for young people through high-quality national traineeships; increased funding for modern apprenticeships to allow another 4,300 young people to take part; doubling support for the adult technicians scheme; and getting demotivated young people back into education and training and on into jobs.

Earlier this week, the training and enterprise councils in Wales launched their own manufacturing skills plan for training to support the manufacturing industry that we have created. It is a vision for the next century and I commend them on their efforts and foresight.

The "Bright Future: Beating our Previous Best" programme is also at the heart of our efforts to promote improved school performance in Wales and it is working. It aims for continuing improvement. Everyone concerned with education knows that schools that rest on their laurels or are content with low expectations and poor results are selling pupils short. Schools throughout Wales are beginning to set themselves targets for improving performance. I have set more targets for education in the new "Bright Future" document. The targets that I am setting are ambitious and testing. I want everyone with an interest in education in Wales to take the opportunity to comment on them, and help shape them.

We are not only improving standards but increasing parental choice, two aims that come together in the popular schools initiative, which is providing £26 million to expand successful, high-achieving schools that are attracting more pupils than they can physically accommodate. In total, 24 schools and the work that we have funded will create an extra 2,000 pupil places. Two thousand more families will be able to send their children to their first-choice school as a result.

Our policy of extending choice also applies to the education of four-year-olds though the nursery vouchers scheme. Some 30,000 out of 35,000 have now registered. The scheme is giving parents a real choice in the education that they want for their four-year-olds. Opposition Members have frequently told us that nursery provision in Wales was so good that the scheme was not needed. Why, then, are we seeing such a sudden, marked improvement in provision? Flintshire, Wrexham and Denbighshire are all moving from quarter-time provision to at least half-time provision for all four-year-olds from April. Anglesey and Conwy also propose statutory notices, which will allow admission of four-year-olds earlier and will therefore offer all four-year-olds a full three-terms provision. Gwynedd has also announced its intention to expand nursery provision for four-year-olds from April, and for three-year-olds from September. If nursery provision was so good before, how come all those improvements are taking place now that the nursery vouchers scheme has been introduced? They are not the results of a failing, unwanted, unneeded scheme, as it has been described. They are the results of another measure to increase choice and opportunity, to which Opposition Members have been blindly opposed.

Our educational reforms are important for their own sake, but they are also part of our strategy for creating a modern and prosperous economy in Wales. Sometimes, people fear that our economic success will be bought only at a high cost to our environment. I take the opposite view. The countries with the worst environmental records in Europe were those bankrupt economies of the eastern bloc. Only healthy, prosperous economies can protect their environment, and we in Wales are demonstrating that economic progress and respect for nature can go hand in hand.

We have been able to fund the largest land reclamation programme in Europe, and I recently presented certificates recognising respect for the environment to companies ranging from National Power at Aberthaw to Kyushu Matsushita at Newport, and many others are working toward or achieving those high standards.

We have launched a business and environment campaign, making companies more aware of the impact of their operations on the environment. We have increased the funding of the Countryside Council for Wales for the

[Mr. Hague]

second successive year, established a Wales biodiversity group, and launched the Environmental Education Council for Wales.

Those measures add up to a coherent and wide-ranging package to protect and enhance the Welsh environment. We already have a good record on improving the quality of our air and water. Some 98 per cent. of rivers in Wales are of good or fair quality. Bathing waters around Wales have never been cleaner, with results for 1996 showing a 93 per cent. compliance with European standards, compared with less than 50 per cent. in 1986 when testing first began.

Last year, I was involved in the launch of the green sea initiative. That is unique to Wales and involves Dwr Cymru—Welsh Water—the Wales tourist board and many others working together toward the ambitious aim of achieving 50 blue flags on the Welsh coastline by 2000. That will give Wales the edge in terms of both its coastal environment and its ability to attract tourists. Next week, I shall launch the Welsh Coastal Forum, to bring together all those involved in caring for the coastline and our coastal waters.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): The Secretary of State will remember that it is almost exactly 12 months since the Sea Empress disaster, when 70,000 tonnes of oil spilled mainly on to the Pembrokeshire coast, but also affected other parts of the south Wales coast. The Government refused to hold a public inquiry, but allowed the Department of Transport to hold its own internal inquiry. As the Secretary of State knows, that has not yet reported. Will he have a word with his colleagues in the Department of Transport? The people of Pembrokeshire and of Wales should see that report before the general election and before the Government run away from the problem.

Mr. Hague: That inquiry is being conducted by the marine accidents investigation branch, not by the Department of Transport as an internal inquiry. I understand that the report will be published shortly, and then the House can look at it.

As the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) said, this month marked the first anniversary of the Sea Empress incident. One year on from the incident, we can look back on a successful clean-up operation, which, at its peak, involved more than 1,000 people from different organisations. That effort enabled all the main tourist beaches to be cleaned within eight weeks, culminating in Tenby north beach winning a blue flag award during the summer.

We also set up the Sea Empress environmental evaluation committee, to investigate the environmental impact of the oil spill, including consideration of clean-up techniques. Nearly £2 million of Government funds—half of it from the Welsh Office—has been made available for the costs of the programme of works identified in the committee's initial report. Its final report is due in the autumn. We shall learn a lot about how to help nature fight back from such blows and we shall spread the results of our research and monitoring as widely as possible.

It is almost a year since I published "A Working Countryside for Wales". It represented the most comprehensive review ever undertaken of the Government policies affecting rural Wales. In setting out a detailed vision and a framework for sustainable development, the White Paper has pointed the way for the future by balancing sound economic development against the protection of Wales' rich environment. It represents another opportunity—the opportunity of living in a healthy, working countryside, with jobs for young people who can sustain and develop their own communities.

I shall publish a review of the White Paper next month, but I can tell the House now that 63 of the 94 commitments have already been met, including the development of a food strategy for Wales; the launch of the DBRW's market towns initiative; the review of the various agri-environmental schemes, including Tir Cymen; support for communities; the creation of new employment opportunities; and measures to protect the environment. More are in the pipeline.

Farming plays an important role in the Welsh rural economy. In the past year, all three main sectors—dairy, sheep and beef—have been affected in some way by the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis. The Government have responded to the crisis by committing support to maintain the structure of the industry in the UK. In addition, more than 150,000 Welsh animals have been slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme and nearly 90,000 Welsh calves have gone through the calf processing scheme.

There should be no doubt about the Government's commitment to the livestock industry in Wales. We recognised the need to bolster confidence in hill cattle farming in the less-favoured areas by announcing last year that the Budget would ensure that an extra £60 million was paid to UK hill livestock compensatory allowance cattle claimants in 1997. In addition, sheep farmers' incomes receive a considerable boost from annual payments of sheep annual premium amounting to £138 million. Those measures have supported the industry in Wales through a very difficult period. Consumer confidence is now returning; we all know that British beef—including Welsh beef—is safe to eat.

A major part of the Welsh Office budget is devoted to health, and here too we are working hard to improve services and standards throughout Wales. We are committed to increasing health spending in Wales each year over and above inflation for the life of the next Parliament. The Labour party has been extremely shy of stating its intentions in that respect. We want to know whether Labour Front Benchers will match my commitment today.

In the coming year, spending on capital schemes for the national health service in Wales will take the level of capital investment to more than £2 billion since 1979. This year, Wales' second cardiac centre will open, providing patients in west Wales with access to a local facility of high quality. At Ysbyty Glan Clwyd, after so many years, work will begin on the cancer treatment centre that will be the centrepiece of a comprehensive cancer service in north Wales. Only last week, I announced a further £1 million in support of recommendations from an expert group to improve cancer services throughout Wales. A number of capital schemes for Cardiff are also going ahead. Spending per head has increased by 89 per cent. in real terms since 1979.

All health authorities in Wales have had increases in spending this year. It falls to them to determine their priorities within their budget. However, I am aware that

the consultation document circulated by Dyfed Powys health authority has caused widespread concern and controversy, especially in relation to community hospitals. Any significant change in health services in Dyfed Powys, as elsewhere, that could not be agreed locally would have to come to me for decision. In considering any proposal, I would have strong regard to local views and local health needs. I want to make it clear that I am convinced of the important role played by community hospitals—especially between the primary and secondary care sectors—and would wish to see such hospitals retain their role in delivering NHS care.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his clear rebuke of the outrageous conduct of the chairman of Dyfed Powys health authority, who announced on 23 December that eight community hospitals in Dyfed and Powys would close, without it being her responsibility to close them and without even knowing which hospitals she was talking about. Will he now confirm that rebuke by sacking the chairman of the Dyfed Powys health authority at once?

Mr. Hague: I am not delivering a rebuke of any individual. Health authorities are entitled to consult on future actions and I am making clear the approach that I will take on the matter.

Local views are important in the health service, as they are in local government. I see a strong and continuing role for local government in Wales and have transferred additional powers to local authorities in the past year. I have provided for the coming year an increase of £64 million in central Government support for local government—an increase that is in line with inflation. Local authorities should be able to manage their resources within that increase, which is the limit of what is affordable.

Opposition Members have complained about the settlement—in fact, the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) is muttering about it at the moment—but they invariably refuse to say from where they would obtain extra money. They describe the local government settlement as "inadequate", but they have also made it clear that a two-year commitment to stick to our spending plans in total applies across the board, and therefore to Wales. They have yet to say how they would finance higher spending by councils within a fixed total, unless it is by sharp rises in council tax or reductions in spending elsewhere.

The Opposition have also said in the House that the budget of the Welsh Development Agency will not be sufficient, but how is a higher WDA budget to be financed out of a fixed total? In addition, there would be their Welsh Assembly to pay for—many millions of pounds to be spent on the most expensive roomful of hot air in the history of Wales. How would that be financed out of a fixed total, let alone a fixed total that already assumes continuing major reductions in the running costs of the Welsh Office and its non-departmental public bodies?

The fact is that the Opposition are trying to get away with a great illusion—a con trick. The problem facing them is that the form of words that they have adopted to please the City cannot be reconciled with the words they use to please every pressure group or authority that knocks on their door. It is time they answered the questions of how and from where they would finance the additional expenditure for which they continually call. I am sure that they will try their level best to answer those questions in the debate.

Wales is doing well: it is experiencing rising prosperity, growing employment, improved infrastructure and higher standards of education. Our priority for the future is to continue that record; the Opposition's priority for the future is to blunder into constitutional chaos. I have no doubts about which approach will bring the greatest benefits to the people of Wales.

5.35 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): This afternoon, we have witnessed an amusing presentation that faltered between the comic and the rose-tinted spectacles. I should apologise on behalf of the shadow Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), who is on his way to the Labour party Wales conference in Llandudno, which opens tomorrow and is the prelude to Labour Government in Wales. I also apologise for the absence of all the other Labour Members of Parliament who wished to be present at the moment of victory—of which we shall hear later today—in Wirral, South, which is conveniently placed for a short trip across to Llandudno for the conference the following day. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly is not in Wirral, but on his way to Llandudno.

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): I wish to point out that it does not take three days to get to Llandudno—it takes three hours.

Mr. Griffiths: The roads of this country are so clogged up with traffic and in such a state of disrepair that one would be lucky to get from London to Llandudno in five hours, let alone three. If the right hon. Gentleman can get there in three hours, he must be breaking the speed limit most of the way.

Before speaking about the broader issues relating to Wales at the end of the 20th century, I want to say a few words specifically about the Sea Empress disaster. That event is no longer fresh in our minds, but we should remind ourselves of the scale of the pollution—the thousands of sea birds that were killed along with the damage caused to other marine life; the continuing ban on some sea food harvest; the damage to about 200 km of coastline; the increase in physical and psychological illness among people living in the affected coastal area; and the trauma caused to the pilots and to all those involved in the rescue operation.

Having reminded the House of the disaster, I want to ask the Secretary of State, who also referred to it, several questions. What involvement has he had in developments relating to the clean-up and investigation of the disaster? What guarantees can he give that a similar disaster will not happen in the future? Has he discussed with the Secretary of State for Transport and the Environment Agency the possibility of prosecuting the polluters? Is he now satisfied that the appropriate back-up services—suitably powered tugs and so on—are in place to cope with and ensure a more satisfactory outcome from a similar disaster, if we were so unfortunate as to suffer another?

Lastly, I repeat a question that the Secretary of State has been asked several times: why are the Government delaying the publication of the final report on the Sea

[Mr. Griffiths]

Empress disaster? Surely the Secretary of State must be aware that, whatever criticisms it may contain of the conduct of the Government and their agencies, it is hardly worth keeping them from the public to protect the prospects of Conservative candidates in Pembrokeshire in the general election, as the latter are doomed to failure anyway.

Will the Secretary of State commit himself now to ensuring that the Secretary of State for Transport publishes the report before the end of March? Obviously the Secretary of State does not wish to intervene now; he may want to consider the matter and give some direction to the Minister for the wind-up speech.

Like the Secretary of State, I welcome all the good news that we have had this year—the LG investment, the continuing expansion of Sony, the additional investment in Ford, and today's announcement that £203 million of European regional aid is coming to Wales.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) said, surely the most significant aspect of that news is that those companies are coming to Wales knowing that in all likelihood there will be a Labour Government, and they are well prepared to support that Labour Government by investing in Wales. I draw a contrast between the attitude of those companies and the statements by the leaders of Unilever, British Aerospace and many other British companies, who are already implementing the social chapter and find no problem with it but are disturbed about the way in which the Euro-sceptics are running amok in the Conservative party and threatening to pull the United Kingdom out of Europe—or at least to make it Tory party policy to do so.

We want to welcome those good news announcements, but how do they fit into the pattern of Welsh economic performance under Tory tutelage? They are oases, places of beauty and hope, in a landscape that is still too hostile for the green shoots of growth and prosperity to flourish.

The recently published "Regional Trends" report reveals that Wales has the lowest income per household of any region in the United Kingdom. The Welsh Office publication of June 1996, "Meeting the Challenge—the Competitiveness of Wales," said:

"Welsh GDP per head has consistently been the lowest of any region in Great Britain."

The most recent "Economic Trends" shows that in 1995, Welsh gross domestic product decreased in relation to the UK average. In 1994, it was 84 per cent. of the UK average. In 1995 it dropped to 83.3 per cent. Those are hardly the signs of a growing and flourishing economy.

A Welsh Office publication said:

"A smaller proportion of the working population (both males and females) in Wales is economically active than in other Great British regions."

We are told that

"In Wales in 1993 and 1994 business Research and Development was roughly 0.5% of GDP compared to 1.4%"—

nearly three times as much—

"for the UK as a whole."

Wales is an economic region of high unemployment. Of a total of 96,400 unemployed, 31,000 are long-term unemployed, 28,000 are young unemployed and of those 5,500 are long-term young unemployed. There are 61,000 fewer jobs in Wales than there were in June 1979 and 133,000 fewer men are in full-time jobs than in June 1979. Unemployment in Wales is costing the taxpayer more than £800 million a year. That is the true picture: high unemployment, low pay on average, and a GDP at best stagnant, at worst declining. Those are the characteristics of the Welsh economy.

Average earnings for Welsh men working full time are £331.40 a week—the second lowest figure in the United Kingdom. Only Northern Ireland's figure, at 50p a week less, is lower. Greater London is £170 a week ahead.

In 1979, we were near the top of the regional pay league; we are now firmly at the bottom. In 1979, men's average earnings in Wales were 96.2 per cent. of the Great Britain average; in 1995, they had dropped to 88.4 per cent. In 1979, women's weekly earnings in Wales were 97.4 per cent. of the British average; in 1995 they had dropped, like the Welsh men's earnings, to 88.4 per cent.

During that period, men's average weekly earnings in Wales have increased by 29 per cent. in real terms, but the Great Britain increase is 41 per cent. Women's average earnings have increased by 48 per cent., but in Great Britain as a whole the figure is 63 per cent. We are lagging behind; we have not been sharing the growth in income.

The Welsh Development Agency corporate plan records that Welsh living standards are now 76 per cent. of the UK average. Despite all the recent welcome announcements, investment is growing more slowly in the current recovery than in any other this century, and we invest less as a proportion of our national income than any European country.

Our investment record is feeble. Germany invests 60 per cent. more than the UK as a share of national income, Hong Kong 92 per cent. more, Singapore 128 per cent. more. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that manufacturing productivity is 77 per cent. higher in the United States, 44 per cent. higher in the Netherlands, 37 per cent. higher in Germany and 26 per cent. higher in France than in the UK. The list of countries that are out-performing us is almost endless.

Given the continuing under-performance of the Welsh economy, why is the Secretary of State seeking to cut the WDA budget in 1998–99 by about £8 million? Why is he directing it, as I understand it, to move out of urban, rural, environmental and business services for home-grown companies—the very companies that feel that they do not receive the same attention and support as major inward investors? Who will take over that crucial support for indigenous companies if it is moved from the WDA, as I understand the Secretary of State intends?

What consultation has the Secretary of State undertaken with the WDA and businesses in Wales before introducing that surreptitious shift of policy? Is he intent on turning the WDA into an inward investment agency only? Home-grown companies deserve an answer, as it would appear that the Secretary of State is turning them into the second-class citizens of the Welsh economy.

Mr. Hague: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is talking about and I am not sure whether anyone else in the building knows what he is talking about. There are no plans for the WDA to do as he has described. It is very important to support indigenous home-grown companies

as well as inward investors. I have issued no instruction or request to the Welsh Development Agency that it change its approach to that in any way.

Mr. Griffiths: So the Secretary of State is confirming that the WDA will not move out of urban, rural, environmental and business services to companies in Wales? I understand that some strategic directions are being given to the WDA—perhaps they are circulating internally—but I am pleased to hear the Secretary of State say that that will not happen.

The rural economy is not in good shape, either. It has been blighted by the continuing saga of the Government's incompetence on a grand scale in the handling of bovine spongiform encephalopathy. Ever since repudiating, about 10 years ago, the warnings of my hon. Friends the Members for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and for Caerphilly about BSE, the Government have always appeared determined to act when it is too late. That indecision has cost the Welsh taxpayer about £140 million, and Welsh beef and dairy farmers have lost millions of pounds in lost cattle sales, even taking into account the various amounts of compensation paid by the Government.

It has been estimated that, if the export ban continues, up to 3,000 jobs could be lost in the rural economy. On top of that, fears remain about the availability of licensed abattoirs and animal carcase incinerators to deal with the slaughtered cattle. What tests have been done to establish the ability of incinerators to destroy BSE prions, and what checks are made to ensure that the planning consents for those incinerators are not being breached?

Whether in rural or industrial areas, the Tory housing record leaves much to be desired. Over the past three years, local government housing renovation grants and housing capital provision have been cut by 24 per cent. in real terms. The Secretary of State may remember that, when he announced his Welsh Office budget for 1996–97, he allocated £85.1 million to Tai Cymru, from which he said that he expected Tai Cymru to finance about 3,000 housing starts in that year. Miraculously, last December, when the right hon. Gentleman allocated £25 million less to Tai Cymru than he had in the previous year, he said that he still expected it to make around 3,000 housing starts.

How does the Secretary of State expect to maintain housing starts when he has cut Tai Cymru's budget by nearly 30 per cent.? No wonder homelessness in Wales has increased by 68 per cent. in the last decade, with over 9,000 families accepted as homeless in 1995. No wonder the number of public housing starts has constantly fallen below Tai Cymru's preferred target of 4,000 a year. Indeed, in some areas the number has been 25 per cent. below that target.

The Government are ignoring the crisis in our education service. Despite recent improvements, far too many of their policies have resulted in the maintenance of a stubbornly long tail of under-achievement in our schools, and in low expectations among our pupils. The Government are ignoring the imminent shortage of engineers in south-east Wales—a problem that is already acute but which, when LG comes on line, will be brutal, with a knock-on effect throughout Wales. At present Britain is 42nd in the world skills league, and Wales, within Britain, is near the bottom of the table.

Only 58 per cent. of our 17-year-olds remain in full-time education, whereas the figure is 77 per cent. in the United States, 87 per cent. in France, 90 per cent. in Japan and 93 per cent. in Germany. We are nowhere near reaching the national targets on training, set—at least in part—with business. The target of two A-levels or their vocational equivalent, advanced GNVQ or NVQ level 3, is 60 per cent; in Wales we manage 44 per cent., less than the British average and miles behind France and Germany, which manage 58 per cent. and 63 per cent. respectively.

In 1996, 32 per cent. of students in Wales achieved grades A, B or C in maths, science and English or Welsh. The Welsh Office target of 50 per cent. will be very difficult to meet when the Government are cutting, in real terms, the resources available to schools through the local government settlement. Although the settlement was roughly in line with inflation, once the additional amount for the police and care in the community was taken out, the amount that local government could spend on its other services was about 1 per cent. below the level of inflation, and we are now seeing cuts across the board in virtually every local education authority.

At all stages of education and training, the Government are cutting resources because of their poor management of the economy. The 1990s in particular have been characterised by inadequate and unfair funding, which has led to cuts in teaching and support staff, class size and pupil-teacher ratio increases, the overstretching of special education support services to the point of breakdown and a deterioration in the condition of school buildings to the point at which some are health and safety hazards. The Minister shakes his head, but his chief inspector's own report comments on the bad state of many buildings.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Jonathan Evans): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell us whether, on the basis of his researches, he is at least prepared to accept that all the information from the inspectorate suggests that the gap between the performance of Welsh students and that of English students has narrowed considerably during the life of the present Government. Perhaps he will also confirm that, when his party was last in office, the gap widened.

Mr. Griffiths: It is certainly true that the chief inspector has been very effective in ensuring that schools in Wales are given the advice, guidance and support they need in order to improve, but all that has been achieved very much despite, rather than because of, what the Government are doing. We need only speak to a cross-section of teachers in Wales to discover that that is their view.

Is it not strange that the enterprise centre of Europe—that, we are told, is what Britain is—seems to have been so badly managed by Conservative Members that the national debt has doubled since 1990?

Mr. Richards: A moment ago, the hon. Gentleman said that the local government settlement in Wales was too low, and that services had been cut. Will he tell us how much higher the settlement should be in the next fiscal year—1997–98—to become fairer?

Mr. Griffiths: When we have the opportunity to open the books in the Welsh Office, the right hon. Gentleman will be able to study, from his armchair—I do not know whether he still has his public house in Ystradgynlais—

[Mr. Griffiths]

exactly how we are going to improve the position for local government and other sectors in Wales, because of our determination to use the money that is available much more effectively.

What is the Government's record? In primary schools in the 1990s, there have been unrelenting increases in the number of children taught in classes of over 30. At the last count, at least 74,000 children—25 per cent. of primary school pupils in Wales—were being taught in such classes. That is an increase of at least 16,000 since the last election.

In further and higher education, the good news of expanding numbers has been soured by reductions in spending per student. In 1997–98, the Further Education Funding Council for Wales and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales will have their budgets cut by £1 million and £6 million respectively. Perhaps it is no surprise that nine of the 26 FE colleges are in deficit this year, and that it is predicted that 15 will be in deficit the year after next. Welsh higher education is also reporting cuts in critical areas. In Swansea, Cardiff, Newport and the university of Glamorgan, engineering and science courses are being dropped, at the very time when efforts should be made to encourage more participation to meet the need for skilled engineers and technicians when the LG investment in Newport comes on stream.

Again, the good news about the expansion of modern apprenticeships and the increase in the numbers of technicians is tempered by reductions that have been made in the Welsh Office's employment and training budget during the lifetime of the present Government, from £152 million in 1992 to £136 million in April this year. The sad fact is that, despite some progress in the past four years, Wales has a smaller share of 17 and 18-year-olds in full-time education than any other OEDC country except Turkey.

It is, perhaps, even sadder that, according to recent studies commissioned by the South and Mid Glamorgan training and enterprise councils, between 15 per cent. and 25 per cent. of school leavers within two years of leaving school have spent much of their time out of education, training or work of any kind—the so-called status zero. The Prime Minister himself said that our education system was failing 80 per cent. of our pupils; yet, after 18 years of Tory rule, the historic long tail of failure has hardly begun to be tackled.

By recognising the realities of Tory failure, we are not selling Wales short but facing the challenge of being prepared to tackle the unresolved problems of the Government's rule. The decline must be halted, and the key will be the extent to which the prospective Labour Government can forge new partnerships in Wales. We will place immense importance on the transition from the Welsh Office to the Welsh Assembly, where we can have a rational, national debate about the making of policy, which does not happen under the Government, where priorities chop and change at the behest of the Secretary of State with little or no debate.

One Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), was committed to partnership with Europe. Another, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), wanted to avoid it like the plague. The present Secretary of State just follows the twists and turns of the Prime Minister. The current Secretary of State placed great importance on the role of the Countryside Council for Wales, while his predecessor sought to diminish it. There is no debate about these issues. They depend on the whim of the Secretary of State of the day.

All the historically strong European economies have strong regional institutions. Amazingly, the Secretary of State extols the virtue of Wales's links with Baden-Wurttemburg, Catalonia, Lombardy and Rhone-Alpes without seeing the strength of their regional government as an essential part of their economic success.

Mr. Wigley: I have been listening with interest to the way in which the hon. Gentleman is developing the argument with regard to the role that the Assembly will play, particularly in education. If there is an incoming Conservative Government in five years' time, and if they want to pass legislation to extend nursery vouchers to affect primary or even secondary education, how will the Assembly proposed by Labour deal with that? The Scottish Parliament will have law-making powers, whereas the Assembly that Labour proposes for Wales will not, and it will have to live with legislation passed by right-wing Tory Governments.

Mr. Griffiths: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman takes such a dismal view of the future. We feel that there is no need to be troubled by those issues. We look forward to a future in which a Welsh Assembly can act as a democratic dynamo, inspiring participants from all the social partners and all parts of Wales to develop with Assembly Members and the Welsh civil service national strategies for jobs and wealth.

The Secretary of State is also developing the social partner concept—

Mr. Hague: Gibberish.

Mr. Griffiths: The Secretary of State calls it gibberish, but I note that on the Welsh Development Agency board are people who represent local government, trade unions and business in Wales. Perhaps he does not understand what the term "social partners" means.

We look to the sub-regional committees of the Assembly to focus on their parts of Wales and bring together the development agencies, higher and further education institutions, TECs, local authorities and representatives of local trade and industry to pursue commonly agreed objectives for sustainable economic development.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Griffiths: No. I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once, and I want to complete my speech to allow others to speak.

An essential part of the process will be the regional education and training forum, bringing together Welsh Office and Welsh Assembly Members and officials, LEAs, higher and further education institutions, TECs, development agencies and employers to raise educational and skill standards, which are so necessary in any successful, advanced, modern economy.

We need a highly trained and adaptable work force to get the right inward investment and to develop our home-grown companies to broaden the base of our economy. Our emphasis on the need for a learning society in Wales in which the knowledge and skills of all people are extended in a process of lifelong education cannot be overstated. We must offer education opportunities for all people. Ours is a commitment to a universal high-quality education. We believe that every child deserves to go to a successful school.

As we approach the new millennium, we want a Wales in which well educated citizens contribute to a healthy and wealthy economy that offers continuing opportunities for self-fulfilment to all, not just the privileged few. Educational excellence is Labour's aspiration for the people of Wales in the 21st century. I look forward next year to Labour's aspirations being implemented by a Government headed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), whose declared priority is "education, education, education".

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Horserace Totaliser Board Act 1997

Land Registration Act 1997

Sea Fisheries (Shellfish) (Amendment) Act 1997

Telecommunications (Fraud) Act 1997

Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997

Local Government (Gaelic Names) (Scotland) Act 1997

Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997

Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997

Planning (Hazardous Substances) (Scotland) Act 1997

Planning (Consequential Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1997

Civil Procedure Act 1997

United Nations Personnel Act 1997

National Heritage Act 1997

Welsh Affairs

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.

6.5 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): I realise that some hon. Members may greet my announcement that this will be positively my last appearance in the annual debate on Welsh affairs with a polite sigh of relief. After 27 years' participation one way or another, even my feelings are mixed. I prefer beginnings to endings.

This has traditionally been a day for state-of-the-nation speeches from the Front Benches and state-of-the-constituency speeches from the Back Benches. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) is not with us. I mean no disrespect, of course, to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), who took his place. I am consoled by the fact that the hon. Member for Caerphilly is in Llandudno, in my constituency, where he will undoubtedly see the record investment that has taken place there over the past 18 years. He will see it in the glorious vistas of the A55 and in that great triumph of engineering the Conwy tunnel, and in its sister tunnels at Penmaenmawr and Penmaen-bach. He will also see it in the development of Llandudno hospital, which the Liberals have been threatening with closure for the past 30-odd years.

All in all, year on year, the official record of these debates is an essential part of the background to the history of Wales and its people in our time. I hope that these debates will continue.

I shall dip only briefly into the past to set the present and future in perspective, but it is worth reminding ourselves just how heavily dependent we were for employment in Wales on coal and steel, and how both sides of the House came to realise that those industries could not be sustained indefinitely with subsidies from the taxpayer. It will interest hon. Members to know that, as late as 1978-79, the National Coal Board received the equivalent of £1.2 billion in subsidies, and British Steel £2.1 billion at today's prices. There was a string of pit closures in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and a slimdown in the steel industry. At the same time, considerable efforts were made, through substantial investment, to modernise those industries and make them economically viable.

Those efforts were more successful in the steel industry, probably because we started from a better base. There was no denying the fall in demand for coal, and the severity of competition in steel. Thousands of jobs were lost, and we needed new industries. They came as inward investment from abroad: Sony in 1972 and Ford in 1976. I pay tribute to our predecessors on both sides of the House who had to face up to those difficult problems and take some tough and painful decisions.

Some of us had the pleasure of hearing Lord Callaghan at lunchtime. When he represented Cardiff, South he had to endure the closure of East Moors steelworks in his constituency. Similarly, Michael Foot had to face the prospect of the end of steelmaking in his constituency of Ebbw Vale. I must commend the foresight of those, including the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), who anticipated the devastating

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

consequences of those and other closures on our economy, and took steps to ameliorate the effects by establishing the means to attract and develop new industry.

Hon. Members will know that, from 1979, my noble and spirited Friend Lord Crickhowell, then the Secretary of State, led mission after mission to North America and Japan, at some cost to his health, as did his successors. As a result, some 300 overseas companies have established 380 plants and provided 75,000 jobs in Wales. I am glad to say that I played some part in that. I visited Japan and met the president of Hoya: I am still wearing the Hoya lenses that I acquired before I met him. I also visited North America and Europe to procure jobs for Wales. I know from experience how important an attraction to foreign companies was the unrivalled quality of the Welsh work force and its astonishing flexibility. The co-operative, welcoming attitude of the local authorities was also very much to the fore. All those people deserve the highest praise for their patience, and their readiness to embrace new developments.

Local indigenous companies were not ignored. Laura Ashley began as a kitchen industry: that is how the great lady herself described it. It was a local company and grew to employ hundreds of people in mid and north Wales; and it still does. Control Techniques and other companies also achieved international stature.

Someone said that history is the biography of great men—and, I am sure, women. Wales has been fortunate in having people who have dedicated themselves with a will to tackling its problems, including my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State. My dearest wish is that that tradition will continue.

I must also draw attention to the extensive support that Wales has received from the rest of the United Kingdom in its transition to a more diversified economy. It was not just money that came to us; there was more to it than that. There was good will towards us; a will that we should succeed in Wales. Without that assistance from the rest of the United Kingdom at home and abroad, the change that we have witnessed would hardly have been possible.

We still require that assistance to make further advances, and to raise the standard of living of our people in Wales. The standard needs raising, as is shown by the statistical data to which the hon. Member for Bridgend referred. We all know that, but it stands to reason that we should not put support from the United Kingdom at risk. If we do, we put the future prosperity of the people of Wales in peril.

We are all agreed—Conservative Members at least—that we need more and better jobs in Wales, and that that is the way to raise wage levels and improve conditions. We must pursue present policies vigorously and relentlessly, as my right hon. Friend is doing. We realise that circumstances may change, that there may be fewer potential inward investors about and that competition for their investment may become keener. We have known that situation in the past. We may have to change tack and provide more forceful encouragement to indigenous businesses in the westernmost parts of Wales, but our main thrust is right: jobs, more jobs, better jobs. That must be our top priority. I want to see Wales vie with the very best and most prosperous regions in the United Kingdom.

The Opposition pay lip service to that kind of thinking, but in reality their major priority is purely political: to make constitutional changes and to establish a Welsh Assembly. That is already taking a great deal of their time and energy. If Labour wins the election—which I do not think it will—it will take up even more time. There will be the referendum campaign followed by a protracted legislative process. What will happen to the Welsh economy while all that diversionary activity is going on? There will be little progress, if any, because everyone will be distracted from the main aim of improving economic conditions in Wales.

I listened to the hon. Member for Bridgend, but he had nothing to offer us. He talked about partnerships, about chatting up people across Wales and about asking for more money, but he did not tell us where he would get it from or say what he would do as a result of that talking-shop activity in Wales. It is not just him: I do not want to blame him unduly. If—it is a very big if—a few years from now, the 60 assemblymen are comfortably seated in Cardiff, Caerphilly or perhaps Llandudno, sorting out their responsibilities for the quangos, how much better off will the people of Wales be as a consequence? Not a penny piece.

There will be confusion. We already know of the 20 questions that the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) has put to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). They contain an implicit threat. We can be sure that confusion will reign, and confusion is not a prescription for progress.

I warn Labour Members that their assembly proposals are a recipe for divisiveness. Wales is easily divided: Cardiff versus the valleys, north versus south. Furthermore, it is a recipe for unfairness. One thing that can be said of my right hon. Friend and his predecessors in the Welsh Office is that they have always dealt fairly and equitably with every part of Wales and with all the people of Wales. I am not sure that that would happen necessarily under an assembly.

An added problem is that an assembly would isolate Wales from the rest of the United Kingdom and, possibly, from the world, which would be dangerous because our national needs in Wales will not be met if we are isolated. They would be ignored, so I have serious misgivings about the future that the Opposition hold out to us, and I assure them that those misgivings are shared by many people in Wales—as they were almost 20 years ago.

I may be accused of being somewhat servile—that is the worst that has been thrown at me. My reply is that at least I recognise a gift horse when I look it in the mouth. I know where power lies. Opposition Members should not forget that Nye Bevan set out on that search and he ended up here. It is here in Westminster and in Whitehall that power lies, and this is where it will remain.

Members of Plaid Cymru frequently refer to the recent progress made by the Republic of Ireland with assistance from Europe—which I welcome—but they tend to forget that the Republic has taken a long time to reach its present position, that it still has 11 per cent. unemployment, and that 43 per cent. of its population is under 25. A fifth of our population are pensioners, so the situation is different and, of course, the Republic does not have the generous backing that we in Wales receive from the UK. The Irish receive strong support from Europe, but for how long if Europe is enlarged?

Hon. Members will know my tradition—the tradition of the manse—so it is not without reason that I say that, without vision, the people perish. Conservative Members have long cherished the vision of a more prosperous Wales, and we are determined to harness people's energies to realise that vision. I regret to say that the Opposition only pretend to share that vision. It seems to be alien to their thinking. It is certainly not at the core of anything that we have heard this afternoon. The core of their vision for Wales is the consolidation of their party's political power in Wales, so I am inclined to share Nye Bevan's nightmare of people starving in front of their television sets. That seems a distinct possibility as one listens to the offbeat plans and priorities, and the discordant, irresponsible separatist voices in the wings.

In the past 18 years, we have made considerable progress in building new hospitals, laying new roads and improving education and training. Our further and higher education colleges are pervaded by a new spirit of enterprise, but there is still a vast amount to be done by way of improving services when we have the resources at our command. We must keep our eyes fixed on those needs and try to meet them head on. We must not allow ourselves to be diverted in the race—that is the great danger—and we must realise that those needs can be met only by driving the wealth-creation process as hard as we can to produce the necessary resources.

I am sure that we are on the right path. The challenge is to stay on it. The people of Wales wish to do so because it is the only path that offers them hope of a better life. They will enable us to stay on that path provided that we tell them clearly enough the positive benefits that lie ahead and contrast them with the troublesome, counterproductive and, sadly, negative prospects represented by the Opposition.

I am humble enough to think that I may be wrong, but I do not think so. Conservative Members must eliminate those negative, unprofitable prospects and accentuate our positive record of achievement and positive vision of a better material future for the people of Wales. Fortunately, we do not have to worry about the use that Welsh people will make of any prosperity that may come their way: they have an incomparable cultural and linguistic heritage and a rich spiritual inheritance which they will not allow to be lost in the sands of time.

6.25 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): It has always been a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts), but on this occasion, that pleasure is obviously tinged with sadness because, as he said, this is the last occasion on which he will address the House, certainly during a Welsh debate. He has always made his contributions with charm and civility. Although he and I have differed from time to time, especially on the assembly—perhaps he remembers one or two occasions in the dim and distant past when we debated the matter—I have never doubted, indeed I do not think that any hon. Member has, his patriotism and his dedication to his country, to its culture and its language. We shall certainly miss him in the House.

A year is long time in politics, but it is not a long time in economics. Last year, we debated Welsh affairs and the Welsh economy. Despite the bullish upbeat performance by the Secretary of State for Wales, sadly, little has changed fundamentally for the Welsh economy, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) said. It is no good the Secretary of State muttering; sadly, Wales is still at the bottom of the league. It is the poorest region in Britain and has been for the past 18 years, through the 1980s and into the 1990s. The gap between Wales and the rest of Britain may be getting wider—I do not know—but the least that can be said is that we are at the bottom of the pile.

We can find plenty of people to blame. Labour Members can blame Conservative Members and the economic policies of the early 1980s, with interest rates at 17 per cent. and the crippling level of the pound, which destroyed many of our industries. The hon. Member for Clwyd, North–West (Mr. Richards) has his demons: those fat, sleazy, short Labour councillors. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) and his friends have their demons, too—the London Government and the English—and they are looking forward to the new Brussels Government, who, they believe, will one day solve all the problems. Therefore, we can all blame each other and others for this sad state of affairs.

The reality, however—the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West and others mentioned this in the devolution debate—is set out starkly in the Welsh budget, which the Welsh Office has produced, for 1994–95. It is never easy and never has been—I think that it was the Labour Government of 1974–79 who started this exercise—to produce a budget for a separate area, region or country, within a single economic unit such as the UK, but, obviously, things are getting more sophisticated and it is perhaps becoming easier to do so, because there is more information.

I congratulate the Welsh Office on producing the budget. No doubt there are assumptions and perhaps we can challenge some of them, but, by and large, it seems to be a fairly realistic portrayal and analysis of what was happening in 1994-95, although, since then, not much has changed in the Welsh economy.

The figures are stark and worrying. According to the Welsh budget, total Government expenditure was £15.6 billion, but revenue was only £9.9 billion. That is a deficit of revenue against expenditure of £5.7 billion. If we make certain assumptions and take the Welsh gross domestic product in 1994–95 to be £28 billion, we arrive at a dreadful Government borrowing requirement or fiscal deficit of 20 per cent.

When I saw that figure, I thought that it could not be true, so I decided to look at 1996–97, as there had been some improvements. I assumed no increase whatever in public expenditure, a growth rate of 2.5 per cent. a year, or 5 per cent. over the two years, and an increase in revenue of 2.5 per cent. a year, or 5 per cent. over the two years. I rounded up when it was favourable to Wales and rounded down when it was favourable to Wales. I increased the GDP by 2.5 per cent. a year for the coming year, but I still reached a borrowing requirement or fiscal deficit of 15 per cent. for the Welsh economy.

I shall not go back over the Maastricht debate, but we all know that the Maastricht treaty called for a fiscal deficit of 3 per cent. We all read about the troubles and problems of Chancellor Kohl and others in Germany, in trying to reduce the German fiscal deficit from 4 per cent. to 3 per cent.

[Mr. Denzil Davies]

I then looked up the figures for the European Union. The country with the highest deficit is Greece, with a figure of about 8 per cent. We are talking about a deficit of 15 per cent. for the Welsh economy, and that is on favourable assumptions. I do not believe that any country in the western world could survive with such a deficit. It would be impossible to fund a deficit of 15 per cent. Who would fund it? The banks certainly would not fund it, nor would major international corporations. The International Monetary Fund would not fund it without substantial cuts in public expenditure. It just would not happen.

I received at my house in my constituency a piece of paper from Plaid Cymru, advocating that Wales should leave the United Kingdom and join the European Union. That is a fine idea, but it did not explain how a 15 per cent. deficit in GDP would be funded if Wales were to move from one union to another. Some £5 billion would have to be found, and it would not come from the European Commission.

I see that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn has a newspaper cutting saying that Wales is to lose £200 million in regional aid. We are talking about not millions, but billions. We are talking about a deficit of £5 billion or slightly more. There is no way in which it could be funded. Mr. Jacques Santer would not fund such a deficit. The idea that any political party could go to the people of Wales in a general election and say, "Look at Ireland. We shall join the European Union and then we shall be able to survive as an independent nation," is simply impossible.

It is dishonest to the people of Wales to pretend that somehow it would be possible to switch from one union to another and finance an enormous deficit. It could not be done. The Welsh economy would disappear down a black hole. In theory, it could be financed by major cuts in public expenditure and pensions and major closures of hospitals and schools. It just is not credible. I should have thought that Plaid Cymru would at least do the people of Wales the service of making it quite clear that it is economically impossible.

We are also told that money could come to Wales in the same way as it comes to Ireland, and that if Wales could get over that huge chasm and become part of the European Union, it would get more money from the cohesion fund. It would probably receive about five or six times as much as it does now—the figure would probably increase from about £30 million to £40 million now, to about £200 million. That is quite a large sum, but we are talking about millions, not billions. The extra £200 million or so would make no dent in a borrowing requirement of more than £5 billion.

To return to the Welsh economy, it gives none of us any pleasure to draw attention to the difficulties, but they have to be faced. I hope that matters will improve and that the new LG investment, among others, will raise income levels and lower the need for public expenditure, but that can make only a small dent in the deficit in the Welsh economy.

As the right hon. Member for Conwy said, global competition for loose capital will increase. The wages that are paid in manufacturing and engineering in western countries and the United States are certainly far higher than the average wages in those industries, in the global economy. As developing countries develop further and countries such as China begin to produce car components, it is inevitable that the pressure will be even greater on the income that we in the west obtain from producing goods that will also be produced by other countries. Competition will become more intense, and only way in which we in Wales will hold our own, improve and compete will be by trying to ensure that our education system is equipped for the global market.

There has been much emphasis on education in the debate. Companies require an extraordinary combination of skills in their managers and key personnel. They need people with literacy and numeracy skills and technological competence. That is a difficult combination of skills. Sadly, whatever has been said in the debate, I do not believe that the Welsh education system is equipped to create those skills.

Over the past 30 years, the gap between Welsh secondary education and that in the more prosperous parts of England has widened. It is my impression, not empirical evidence, that it has worsened. Certainly, the gap between Welsh state-funded secondary education and the better English public schools has become much wider.

Mr. Alex Carlile: The right hon. Gentleman is making an important point. Will he develop it further by agreeing that the fact that there are now almost no grants available for postgraduate education for Welsh students is diminishing the enormous skills that the brightest young Welsh people have to offer their country and the world? Does he agree that the Government have miserably and wretchedly ignored postgraduate education?

Mr. Davies: Indeed. My generation was able to benefit from that system, but the present generation cannot. Perhaps I can concentrate on the 12 to 19-year-olds, where the gap has grown wider.

In Wales, we pride ourselves on our democracy and the fact that we do not educate an elite. Wales is the only country in the United Kingdom that does not specifically educate an elite. The English do and so do the Scots. I am not quite sure about Northern Ireland, but I suspect that it does, too.

The main condemnation of the way in which the English and Scots educate their elite through their public school system is not that it is a boarding system, or even the fact that they educate an elite—it is that that elite is based on money, because access to the institutions depends on a person's resources. The French seem to have managed to educate an elite through their state system. The Germans, perhaps, have done so as well. The Americans are in an interesting position. They rightly pride themselves on the equality of opportunity that they provide, but they also make sure that they educate an elite. That elite is educated partly through private schools and partly through neighbourhood schools, bolstered by the planning and zoning system, which makes sure that the children who go to those schools are from very well-heeled homes.

Wales is one of the few countries that do not educate an elite. Perhaps we take pride in that—I do not know. The result is that the gap between our education system

and those in England and Scotland for children between the ages of 12, 13 or 14 and 19 is very wide. We are fooling ourselves if we believe that our state secondary system is able to make even a dent in that gap.

I have a brief suggestion.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman's argument means that he will support the provisions in the Education Bill that is before the House.

Mr. Davies: I heard the Secretary of State's brief comments about that. I do not think that the proposals go anywhere near far enough towards solving this very real problem. If those in the educational establishment in Wales read *Hansard*, no doubt I shall be lynched on my way back to the Principality, but I suggest that we should think about trying to educate an elite in Wales between the ages of 12 and 19.

The only way to do that would be by setting up centres of excellence. I shall not talk about elite schools any more—centres of excellence is a fine term. We should establish five or six centres of excellence to educate an elite, based not on money, but on competition, on merit, and on interview or examination.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Grammar schools.

Mr. Davies: No, not grammar schools. I grew up in the grammar school system, and I do not have a starry-eyed, romantic view of it. I do not believe that we can have a grammar school in every town.

Mr. Richards: The right hon. Gentleman said a moment ago that we did not educate an elite in Wales. Surely he of all people will realise that, some years ago, we did—we educated elite people to play rugby at grammar schools in Llanelli, Carmarthen, Bridgend, Gower—

Mr. Anderson: And Swansea.

Mr. Richards: And Swansea. They were an elite, educated by the grammar schools that I am afraid the right hon. Gentleman's party did away with.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman knows better than that. I was not talking about sport. I was trying to address my remarks to the problem that Wales will face in, to use a vogue phrase, the global market in the next millennium. It is a real problem. We have never set out to educate an elite in Wales. The old grammar schools did not do that. The gap between our old grammar schools and the better grammar schools in England—and certainly the better public schools in England—was always wide. Let us have no romanticism about a grammar school in every town.

My suggestion, which no doubt will be shot down in flames by the educational establishment, is to set up five or six centres of excellence. They would have to be boarding centres, because we could not have more than five or six. Entry would be by competitive examination or interview. They would be funded by the state—I shall come back to that in a moment—and they would teach a small number of subjects. They would not teach the easy subjects such as sociology, law, politics, business studies and the others that have crept into the A-level system to provide padding.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Bring back Latin.

Mr. Davies: Yes, indeed. The schools would teach the subjects that would equip young men and women in Wales to compete in this awful global economy that we are faced with. They would have to teach English, because literacy will be very important. It is no use teaching French—French is not on the Internet, and nor are German or Chinese. The language of the global market is English. Those who can communicate in English—when I watch some of our television programmes, I wonder whether some Welsh people can—will have an advantage. The schools should obviously also teach science and mathematics. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) muttered something about Latin. Indeed, we should teach the classics. There is no need to teach any more than that.

Where will the money come from? It cannot come from the present education budget, because that would defeat the whole purpose. We need to raise the standards of everybody. I am not talking about educating an elite at the expense of somebody else. We all have to address funding in this era of iron Chancellors and over-mighty central bank governors. The money would have to come from either a grant from the London Government or the rest of the Welsh Office budget. Hard choices would have to be made, and money might have to be taken from health, transport or other important services, because education is more important than anything else. If we do not equip our young people for the future, we shall not have much of a health service or a transport service or anything else to spend money on, bearing in mind the enormous gap between expenditure and revenue in Wales.

All nations need myths and perhaps small nations such as Wales need more than most. However, one myth that we can do without is the old one that the Welsh really believe in education and that we have a marvellous education system. We do not and we have not had one for a long time. If we do not acquire one, at the end of the next 20 years we shall still be at the bottom of the economic pile.

6.46 pm

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): I, too, begin by paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) for his long service and contribution, as a Member of this House and as a Minister, to his constituents and to the people of Wales.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) made an interesting contribution, as always. He commented on the speech that I made during last Thursday's debate on the constitution. I should like to return to that issue for a short while this afternoon, because it is fundamental to the current debate on devolution, whether one is debating the Labour party's proposals or the more extreme proposal of independence campaigned for by Plaid Cymru.

Last week, I drew on data from the 1994–95 "Government Expenditure and Revenue" report for Wales, published in January this year. As the right hon. Member for Llanelli said, it shows a fiscal deficit of

[Mr. Rod Richards]

£5.7 billion. That is a structural deficit—it is there every year. It is the difference between Government expenditure in 1994-95 of £15.6 billion, and tax receipts of £9.9 billion. Just to maintain public services at the current level and quality, £5.7 billion a year would have to be raised. That is not taking into consideration Plaid Cymru's promises and pledges, which although they are very difficult to cost would certainly add several billion pounds to that deficit.

Since my remarks last Thursday, the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who I am afraid is not in his place at the moment, has come up with what I think he would argue are responses to the charges that Wales could not pay its way in the world at the current level of public services. He said that, if there were an independent Wales, its contribution to the defence budget would be much lower and, therefore, the cost of additional services and the deficit could be made up. I am afraid that that does not stand up to any scrutiny.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon said that, under Plaid Cymru, Wales would spend 1 per cent. of its gross domestic product on defence. The published figures for 1994-95 show that Wales's contribution to defence is £940 million a year. As the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) said, 1 per cent. of Welsh GDP is £280 million. The net contribution to the revenue of an independent Wales would therefore be something short of £700 million, which would still leave a recurring fiscal deficit of more than £5 billion a year.

It is something of a revelation that Plaid Cymru has attempted to quantify its defence policy of all policies because it has not attempted to quantify any other spending pledges. We have the figure of 1 per cent. for defence but nothing else. Normally, a country would decide how much to spend on defence by assessing national security and the threat to it. Having made such a threat assessment, the Government of the day of whichever country would decide how best to meet it by deciding how much money to spend and what resources would be required. I am sure that Plaid Cymru has not thought for a moment about a threat assessment or the national security implications of an independent Wales. Its policy is complete nonsense.

A short while ago, while listening to the debate, I wondered what sort of defence policy and forces Plaid Cymru might have in mind to defend Wales. It occurred to me that some day, under an independent Wales whose assembly is run by Plaid Cymru, we might see a flotilla of stainless steel coracles on the River Teifi, perhaps an armoured regiment of Skodas with mounted peashooters, or even an air squadron of bilingual carrier pigeons. I shall leave that to Plaid Cymru to consider if such a situation ever arises.

The other policy that Plaid Cymru has attempted to quantify is its health policy. About two years ago, it published what it called a health "White Paper", which contained pledges costing many hundreds of millions of pounds on top of the existing level of provision in Wales. The document said quite clearly that health and social services in Wales would be paid for by 9 per cent. of Welsh GDP. Had the person who wrote that paper taken the trouble to look at the data, they would have found that we already spend 10 per cent. of Welsh GDP on health and social services. So, without mentioning any extra resources, Plaid Cymru would have to find an additional 1 per cent. of GDP just to maintain the current level of services.

Bearing in mind the fiscal deficit of £5 billion, the total tax take in Wales from all sources—income tax, corporation tax, value added tax, council tax, and so on—is £9.9 billion. For argument's sake and ease of calculation, let us call it £10 billion. Taxes across the board in Wales would have to be raised by 50 per cent. just to maintain services at today's levels. As the right hon. Member for Llanelli quite clearly said, that is just not feasible; it cannot be done. Plaid Cymru does itself and the people of Wales a great disservice by suggesting that an independent Wales with a Parliament in Cardiff could improve the quality of life in Wales—it could not. The right hon. Gentleman also blew a hole in the myth that Plaid Cymru has woven about European funding. We are talking about small beer—I suppose that it is small beer in Plaid Cymru's terms—of a couple of hundred million pounds here, and a couple of hundred million pounds there. I am talking about a recurring deficit of £5 billion. Members of Plaid Cymru should at least be honest with the people of Wales and say that what they plan cannot be done.

The other comment that the hon. Member for Caernarfon has published since I spoke last week is that much of Plaid Cymru's spending would be financed by increasing the basic rate of income tax in Wales by 2p in the pound, taking it up to 25p. One penny on the basic rate of income tax in Wales raises £60 million, and 2p raises £120 million. That would just about cover the cost of the Welsh television channel S4C, which would presumably be responsible to the assembly or parliament of an independent Wales. Plaid Cymru has been rather silent about S4C, as has the Labour party. Whether S4C would be responsible to an assembly and whether the assembly would finance it is a question for the Labour party as well as Plaid Cymru.

Before I turn to commenting on the Labour party, I should like to make one more point about Plaid Cymru. It continually says that it speaks for the people of Wales. Its members constantly deride the Conservatives because we have six Members of Parliament representing constituencies in Wales. At the last general election, Plaid Cymru was supported by 10 per cent. of the people in Wales—so it does not speak for them. The Conservatives were supported by and large by about 30 per cent. of the people in Wales. We therefore speak for rather more of the people of Wales than Plaid Cymru. It is offensive of Plaid Cymru to suggest, as I am sure the Labour party would also argue, that it speaks for the people of Wales, because 90 per cent. of them do not support Plaid Cymru.

As for the Labour party, it is regrettable that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) is not in his place. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy said, it does not take very long to get to north Wales. Those of us who have constituencies in north Wales frequently have to travel up late on a Thursday evening or very early Friday morning to attend meetings or surgeries. It is bread and butter for us, and just goes to show how rarely the hon. Gentleman has been in north Wales since 1992. Indeed, to my recollection, the only time that he visits north Wales is when there is some form of election pending.

I should like to ask Labour Front Benchers several questions. I do not expect to receive an answer to the first one, because I know that they—certainly the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)—do not have an answer to it. It is the West Lothian question. If the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) has a formula to explain how to resolve the West Lothian question, with an assembly in Cardiff and a Parliament in Scotland, Conservative Members would dearly love to hear it.

The second question—as opposed to the West Lothian question—is more of a Cardiff West question. It was interesting—a mild revelation—to hear the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) talking about a Welsh Assembly forming committees to run the Welsh Development Agency, to run health and to run this and that. However, Conservative Members should like to know what the relationship would be between the Executive—in the form of the Secretary of State for Wales, who is responsible for services such as health and education in Wales—and the assembly? As he said a moment ago, an assembly would have some executive powers. However, the Secretary of State would not be a member of the assembly, and therefore would not have a vote in the assembly on how the Welsh bloc would be distributed or be able to take part in debates on those serious issues.

Therefore, what would be the relationship between an assembly with executive powers and a Secretary of State—who is presumably a member of the Cabinet—with executive powers? Which would be supreme in a dispute? How would a dispute be resolved? How would it work? Perhaps the hon. Member for Bridgend would like to answer that question.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I will arrange for the hon. Gentleman to receive a copy of our document, which explains those matters. Basically, however, the Welsh Assembly will assume the duties and responsibilities that are currently held by the Welsh Office.

Mr. Richards: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that an assembly would have no executive but merely advisory powers? Is he saying that it would have only the power to advise the Secretary of State?

Mr. Griffiths: No.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify what he is saying? If a Welsh Assembly would take the place of the Welsh Office, it would have no executive powers and merely advise the Secretary of State. Perhaps he does not understand how the Welsh Office works.

Mr. Griffiths: The powers and responsibilities currently held by the Secretary of State for Wales will be vested in the Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Richards: Therefore a Welsh Assembly would assume the powers of the Secretary of State. Will the hon. Gentleman therefore tell us—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] The point is very interesting. What would be the Secretary of State's role in the Cabinet? Would he be a messenger boy from the assembly to the Cabinet—or would there be a Secretary of State?

Mr. Griffiths: Yes.

Mr. Richards: I will let the hon. Gentleman think on that for a moment.

My understanding of the proposed assembly is that some of its members would be elected by proportional representation. It would be composed of 60 representatives: 40 of whom will be territorial, representing each constituency in Wales, and 20 of whom will be elected in a list. I should like to ask a question from the point of view of my and other hon. Members' constituents. If a constituent has an issue that he would like to raise with an assembly—with the executive powers that have been described very loosely by the hon. Member for Bridgend—should he contact his territorial, constituency representative or a list representative—or would there be a two-tier system? How would it operate? We do not know the answer. If the hon. Gentleman or the hon. Member for Cardiff, West have an answer, we should very much like to hear it in the reply to this debate.

I should like to return to the matter of Sianel 4 Cymru. It will be very important to many people in Wales to know whether a Welsh Assembly would take over funding of S4C or whether the Department of National Heritage would continue to do so. It is an important issue, and perhaps the hon. Member for Cardiff, West will deal with it in his reply.

7.4 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): In the early evening a year from now—on the occasion of the next Welsh day debate—I suspect that I shall be putting my feet on the domestic fender, pouring a glass of wine for my wife, talking to the children about the day they have had at school and at university and suffering from a little bit of withdrawal at not being in the House to take part in it. I have now been an hon. Member for 14 years, although I do not even pretend to possess anything like the distinction of the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) or to have the respect that he has earned from all hon. Members. I think that many hon. Members—particularly those of us who know north and mid-Wales well—look on him as the best Secretary of State that Wales never had.

As I look back on my 14 years in the House, I think that I will regard occasions such as this—Welsh day debates, Welsh Grand Committee debates and similar occasions—as perhaps not making very much everyday difference to the way of life of people in Wales, but as demonstrating that a tradition of political understanding and lively political debate continues in Wales as expressed in the House, as it did 100 years ago—when the early ferment of Welsh politics, which was exemplified by Lloyd George, was beginning to develop, and when Welsh politics really began to have an enormous impact on the wider politics of the United Kingdom.

Indeed, I would say to those who have ambitions or are interested in a political career—if that is the right noun to ascribe to it; I have always thought that politics was more an activity than a job or a career—that they could start in no better fashion than by reading the early speeches of David Lloyd George, the speeches of people such as Tom Ellis, the very distinguished former hon. Member who served Merionethshire, or those of other of our Welsh political forebears, on whom of course I look with particular affection.

On the wall of my office in the House is a map—from the "Daily Graphic" of that time—of the result of the 1892 general election, which was presented to me by a

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

constituent during the 1992 general election campaign. It shows every single seat in Wales having fallen to the Liberal party. As I leave the House, I wish that I could deliver the same result to the Welsh Liberal Democrats. I will leave it to the public to judge how well the Welsh Liberal Democrats should do at the next general election. I say without fear, however, that I think that we still have a very important role to play in Welsh politics.

When a Welsh regional tier of government—with its democratic element, in whatever form—is established, I look forward to the flowering within that arena of young talents coming from the Welsh Liberal Democrats. I hope that they will be able to make a very considerable contribution to the politics of Wales. Like, I suspect, the right hon. Member for Conwy and other hon. and right hon. Members leaving the House at the forthcoming general election, I shall miss the House enormously. However, like them, I am beginning to discover that opportunities lie outside the House, which perhaps have around them the framework of real life.

On such an occasion, the temptation is of course to indulge oneself in an exegesis of the breadth of Welsh politics, to offer a blueprint for the future and to try to teach some lessons about mistakes made during one's time in the House, but I do not propose to go down that road. I want to talk about only one specific subject.

I am the son of a doctor. My father came to this country in early middle life and worked in the Polish hospital in Penley. We lived in Ruabon. Then he took a job in the national health service as a general practitioner, running a practice—at first single-handed—in Burnley, an industrial town in Lancashire. For many decades, we lived in the house that contained his surgery. I remember hearing from my bedroom window the clacking of the clogs as the cotton workers walked along Trafalgar street to the cotton mills at 5.30 every morning. That was a familiar sound until the mid-1950s. Many of my father's patients were cotton workers, until the cotton industry closed. Another large slice of his patients were coal miners, who came not only from Lancashire, but from Wales, Italy, Poland and Hungary. They came from everywhere. Now the coal mines have closed.

Many of my father's patients lived in streets that evoke in my mind wonderful memories of childhood—Rowley street and Sackville street. They were little slum streets of that great industrial Lancashire town which had already suffered, between the turn of the century and the middle, a decline in its population of almost 50 per cent. The planners—I make no criticism of the political party in charge at the time, although it will not be difficult to guess which party ran Burnley county borough in the 1950s—took the view that the slums should be removed and replaced with beautiful housing estates. Of course, that did not work, and the result was disjointed communities. I still visit Burnley occasionally, because my widowed mother lives there, and I also like to go to Turf Moor, as I have since I was five and a half years old. Burnley still has a community spirit, but it is fighting to retain it.

My father started his life practising medicine as a specialist in central Europe before he became a general practitioner in Lancashire. He used to say to me that the most important social change that had happened in any country this century was the introduction of the national health service. I used to go out on his rounds with him in his Austin A30, not only because the nice ladies in Rowley street gave me sweets, but because I enjoyed his company and the education he gave me, which has stayed with me throughout my life and long after his death.

My father used to say that whether a person was a prince or a pauper—he told me to remember that all princes were bandits once—the national health service treated him the same. If my father chose, as a general practitioner, to send a patient to Professor Charnley in Preston for one of the early hip replacement operations, he could do so as a matter of right, because that was his diagnosis. If he chose to send a patient for a specialist consultation in London, because he judged that the best thoracic surgeon was there, he could do so, as long as he made his choice intelligently. He was greatly respected for the way in which he ran his practice, and his message about the value of the national health service has been imbued in me.

I have continued to take a close interest in medicine and health issues during my life and during my time in the House. I have done it professionally, through my legal practice, and politically. Like the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell), I am a lay member of the General Medical Council. I have been one for some eight years now, and I have learnt a lot about the effect of Government policies on the health service from a different viewpoint, well away from the House.

During my representation of the wonderful county of Montgomeryshire, I have seen the treatment of people's health suffer because of the Government's policies. I regret that. I say in all sincerity to the Under-Secretary that I accept that the Government have not been malevolent, but they have got their policies wrong. The national health service, which my father taught me to believe benefited everyone equally, does not benefit everyone equally any more. That principle has been abandoned—wrongly.

The Secretary of State alluded to the community hospitals in the Dyfed Powys health authority area. There could be no worse example of the way in which people have been regarded not as patients, but as pawns, than the behaviour of that health authority. I am delighted to read in my local newspapers that the Under-Secretary has condemned Dyfed Powys health authority for its behaviour, which should be put on record.

On 23 December 1996, the health authority, deliberately behaving in a Scrooge-like fashion, issued a statement that included the judgment from its powerful position that eight community hospitals in the old counties of Dyfed and Powys would have to close. That was an appalling time to issue the statement and it caused widespread anxiety over Christmas and the new year among staff, patients and potential patients.

On the day the press release was issued, I took the trouble to write to Mrs. Vanessa Bourne, the so-called chairman of the authority, to ask her to reveal to me, as a Member of Parliament for the area concerned, which eight community hospitals she intended to close, and to supply the background papers that justified her conclusion. I received a response of an arrogance that would shock even hon. Members. I wrote to her again. I asked again to see the background papers and I asked which hospitals would be closed. After many weeks, I still await a response to that letter.

The health authority released a further press statement in which every member of the health authority had a little sentence quoted, including references to politicians as though we were the ignorant detritus of society. Those arrogant people should remember that they have been appointed by politicians, and that they are accountable through their board and via politicians to the House. The health authority has produced a plan with no background papers, which refers to no individual hospital, which has no quality learning behind it—the health authority has not denied those facts—and which has caused panic throughout mid-Wales.

Last week in Llanidloes, 1,000 people attended a public meeting about the future of Llanidloes hospital, which is a wonderful community hospital which could be held out as an example to the world, let alone to rural Wales. I regret that the Conservative party failed to send a spokesman to that meeting. Unfortunately, excuses were made. The feeling of the meeting was clear.

This afternoon, the Secretary of State issued a severe rebuke to Dyfed Powys health authority. I hope that that rebuke will be carried through to its logical conclusion, which should include the dismissal of the chairman of the health authority, followed by the resignation of her board. Apparently, the Government believe that the disciplines of management and private industry should be applied to the national health service. I do not disagree that management discipline is useful in the public service. However, if that board and that chairman had been employed by a company in Wales—such as Control Techniques or Laura Ashley, which was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Conwy—the major shareholders would have had them out by midnight. The Government should have that lot out by midnight.

I wish to mention one further national health service issue that is more directly related to my upbringing as a general practitioner's son. Since I went to live in the Welshpool and Newtown area of mid-Wales, I have been the patient of a doctor in Llanfair Caereinion. He is a partner in an excellent practice, and a doctor with political principles. I do not know for which party he votes, but I know that his political principles belong on our side, rather than the Conservative side, of the House.

On principle, and with his partners' agreement, my doctor has chosen not to be a fundholder. There is one similar practice in the area at Westbury in Shropshire, on the border, and about half the patients of that practice live in my constituency.

If I want treatment under the national health service, I am now at a disadvantage; the hospitals where it is provided delay my treatment because my general practitioner, on the basis of a well-thought-out belief and judgment, does not wish to follow the Government's encouragement to have a fundholding practice.

That is not the national health service that my father taught me to respect. It is not the national health service that Lloyd George and others created in this country, and taught this country to respect. It is a national health service infected by greed and devil-take-the-hindmost. That is not the national health service that we want.

As I depart this place and leave politics, I regret above all things the fact that the national health service seems to be in worse fettle than when I entered the House 14 years ago. I hope that the next generation of Welsh politicians will heed the message, and will do what they can to ensure that the great tradition of Welsh politicians who have sought better health for their constituents is maintained for future generations.

7.21 pm

Sir Raymond Powell (Ogmore): I regret the fact that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) is leaving the House—although I get on well with all his Liberal colleagues in the House, too, and have done since I was the Opposition pairing Whip. I have always listened attentively to the hon. and learned Gentleman's speeches, and today was no exception, especially when he was reminiscing about his father and the fact that in the area where he lived he could hear the cotton workers walking across the cobblestones.

Although the *Western Mail* last week printed my birthplace as Machynlleth, I was not born and bred anywhere near there; I was born in Treorchy, in the Rhondda valley. I am proud of my birth and heritage, and of the people of the Rhondda, who are no different from the people in Ogmore, the constituency that I represent now, or from the people of the other valleys.

The hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned Lloyd George and the national health service, but I have read and reread all the words uttered by Nye Bevan during the introduction of the national health service—something that the nation could be proud of. However, the health service has gradually been eroded and left underfunded by the present Administration.

I also share the views that the hon. and learned Gentleman expressed about the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts), who is one of the Secretaries of State we never had. The right hon. Gentleman deserved the office, there is no doubt about that. It used to annoy me every time a Secretary of State was appointed from the other side of Offa's dyke, when everyone in all the parties in the House knew that there was a Member from Wales who could, and would, do the job. Undoubtedly, he would have been nearer to us, because he is from Wales. It annoys me to think that, in the past 18 years, we have had five Secretaries of State for Wales, all of whom were living outside Wales.

I must get on to the subject of my speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or you will be calling me to order. What I wanted to say is that this debate could prove historic. The annual St. David's day debate for 1997 is taking place in the year of the general election that will end 18 years of the most vicious Conservative Government this country has ever known.

I could spend some time telling the story of the industrial rape of Wales that has taken place over those 18 years, but most of my constituents are already well aware of that story, and the other electors of Wales know the nightmare only too well, because they have suffered, and will continue to suffer until a new Government with vision and policies for change are elected. That cannot be much more than 63 days away.

All my time in Parliament has been spent in opposition, but I will fight the next election to retain my seat in Ogmore and cross the floor to the Government Benches. The electors throughout the Principality are crying out for the opportunity to vote; they are crying out for change. They will vote in their traditional way, but this time they will look to the English constituencies, hoping that this time they, too, will want to see change.

[Sir Raymond Powell]

We have seen the number of Conservative Members in Wales reduced to six, and this election we shall see a Conservative-free Wales. Despite what the press and the other media say about politicians, there will be dancing in the streets and celebrations when the electors give their verdict, perhaps on 1 May—the day on which we in Ogmore have always celebrated May day. This year, we shall have something else to celebrate—a Labour victory.

Last week, we had a debate on the constitution. I suggest that hon. Members who could not attend read the *Official Report* of that debate; but, although I have nothing but praise for the *Hansard* writers, they could not capture the atmosphere of the occasion, or the sincerity of most of the speeches. Many more hon. Members wished to contribute as well, but time was not on their side.

I said that this debate could prove historic. It is being held on the day of the Wirral, South by-election, which could put the Government in a minority. If a vote of confidence is called, the election could come early. The debate could be historic for another reason too—it is being held on the eve of the Wales Labour party conference, which will be asked to agree the Welsh Labour party executive committee's proposals for devolution.

In the 1970s, I was party to what was then the vision for the future. That is what Labour party activists called the strongly held views of supporters of devolving government to an elected Welsh Assembly. Mixing reflection, memory, reality and truth, I recall the mood of members of the Labour party in Wales when they met in Llandudno in 1977.

That conference, which I chaired, adopted the document prepared by the executive committee for the introduction by the Labour Government of a Wales Act. *Hansard* for that period will give details of the discussions and decisions. No doubt history will record who was responsible for that lost opportunity. Now, 20 years later, we again have the opportunity to seek a reversal—the opportunity to present to the people of Wales, by their agreement in a referendum, the devolution of power to an elected assembly.

At least some of our efforts in the 1970s have not been wasted. At that time, we argued for an elected assembly with unitary authorities, and some power going to community councils at the local roots. Over the past two years, 22 unitary authorities, covering the whole of Wales, have been established. That is a major step forward, and it is one to be welcomed. I hope that, following devolution, the Welsh Assembly will deal with the escalating problems—including the lack of finance and the system of allocation of funding, which is tightly controlled by the Secretary of State. I hope that this will be remedied by an elected assembly. The £7 billion budget that is now allocated and controlled by the Secretary of State—added to the 180 quangos under his responsibility, which spend more than £2.5 billion and have 850 appointees—is a reason for democratic accountability to be introduced under a Welsh Assembly.

The fears of the Prime Minister and Conservative Members that Welsh devolution threatens the fabric of our unitary state are totally unfounded. The debate last Thursday on the constitution tended to concentrate on Scotland and the House of Lords, and much was said about the West Lothian question. Some suggest that it is insoluble, instead of seeking some way of resolving it. Those who read the *Hansard* report of last Thursday's debate will have seen that my hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland)—in an excellent speech—spoke on the English regions and suggested that English regional government provides part of the answer to the West Lothian question. One of the major reasons why the devolution proposals in 1977 and 1978 failed was undoubtedly the lack of realistic and rational thought on English regional government. I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend give the details of the progress that has been made in the creation of the North of England Assembly of Local Authorities. I hope that other English regions will follow that lead.

We have the problem in reverse in Wales. Where is the justice in allowing English Members to speak and vote on business which is exclusively the interest of the Welsh nation? Where is the justice when English Members are elected to Committees to provide the Government with a majority to get their business through? Where is the justice in allowing a large number of English Members to table questions for Welsh question time, thus depriving Welsh Members of their only opportunity each month to ask the Secretary of State questions applicable to Wales and to their constituencies? They have no other parliamentary opportunity. Where is the justice in having a Secretary of State for Wales—the controller of the Welsh Office—who is not a Welsh Member of Parliament? In the past 18 years, we have had five Secretaries of State for Wales, none of whom has represented a Welsh constituency.

Much has been said about the reformed Welsh Grand Committee, but the Committee of Selection has to appoint the Secretary of State and other English Members to enable them to sit on the Committee so that the Government have a majority. On one occasion, when Peter Walker turned up to start a debate at the Welsh Grand Committee, he was challenged on a point of order and the Committee of Selection had to be recalled to appoint him and others before the business could proceed. There is talk that a solution might be to reduce the number of Welsh Members of Parliament, but it is unthinkable that, as long as Westminster decides on defence, foreign affairs, taxation and social security for Wales, Wales should not continue to be adequately represented at Westminster.

After the election, there will be 72 Scottish Members of Parliament, 40 Welsh Members and 17 Members from Northern Ireland, making a total of 129. There will be 529 English Members of Parliament—so what is there for the Government to fear? Last Thursday, the Prime Minister laid down a challenge that the election would be fought on the constitution and on Scottish and Welsh devolution. The Labour party in Wales is ready for that challenge. The present system of holding the Government to account is deplorable and it is scandalous to allow more money to be spent by unelected and unaccountable quangos than by directly elected local councils. We need to roll back the tide of quangos and revive democracy in local government. The plans for a Welsh Assembly have been set out in detail and we will legislate for their implementation in the first year of a Labour Government.

When discussions were proceeding on our devolution proposals, I made my views known on the questions of a referendum and proportional representation. I am glad that

a referendum will be called, and I am confident that, this time, the result will be totally different. In my view, there should be 80 elected members of a Welsh Assembly—based on current parliamentary constituencies and election procedures—with two from each of the 40 parliamentary constituencies. I have also suggested that there should be one male and one female candidate in each constituency. This would be a great step forward towards achieving a fair gender balance, and would avoid the problem of women-only shortlists. It would also signal to all the women in Wales and the rest of the UK that the Labour party wants more women in the Government.

Perhaps this weekend, the women attending the conference at Llandudno will demand a change in the executive committee's proposals and will rebel—like the Tory women of the Wirral who, according to the *Evening Standard*, are flocking to the polling stations to vote Labour. I hope that they will take up the challenge over the weekend and change the proposals of the executive committee.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) spoke on Thursday and recalled his speeches on the Scotland and Wales Bill and the Wales Bill in 1976 and 1977. He promised the House at that time that we would return to the subject in due course. That was 20 years ago. We have had 20 years to reconsider our policies and to persuade the electors about what devolution would mean to Wales. It has worked, and people are better informed and are responding positively. I believe that devolution will be accepted in the referendum that will follow a Labour victory.

7.37 pm

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Sir R. Powell)—a friend since I was elected to the House in 1982. I am sure that our friendship will continue after I, too, leave the House at the forthcoming election. It has been my privilege to have been a member of the Welsh Affairs Committee since I was elected, and to have been its Chairman since December 1983. My good health has enabled me not to miss one meeting—and, indeed, not one minute of its proceedings—since I was made Chairman.

With your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to share a few memories with the House before turning to the subject that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) raised.

The first highlight I remember was the promise, made in 1983 by the then Secretary of State for Wales, that there would be a second cardiac surgery and cardiology centre in Wales. At last, the present Secretary of State said in the debate today that, later this year, the second cardiac centre would open in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson). It has been much in demand. As far back as 1983, it was recognised that only slightly fewer than 800 adult open heart operations a year were being carried out in the University hospital of Wales in Cardiff, when the need was for at least 1,300.

It is always a bad idea in politics to claim credit for anything, but the Welsh Affairs Committee was at least partly responsible for eliciting one statement from the consultant cardiologist at the Heath hospital in Cardiff which influenced Ministers in the Welsh Office: he wrote to the Committee saying that patients were dying on the wards because of the lack of intensive care facilities. The response was fast, and a promise was made that the new centre would be delivered.

In 1983, the Welsh Office and the Department of the Environment issued waste management paper 25, concerning clinical waste disposal in England and Wales. Unfortunately, the Welsh Office issued it to local authorities in Wales and not to health authorities. At that time, responsibility for monitoring all emissions to air of hospital incinerators lay firmly with health authorities, and it was a major surprise to them to find that out when they came before the Committee in January 1990.

The Welsh Office responded in a wonderful way: it dispatched a civil servant to write a letter to us saying that, with hindsight, it was difficult to understand how the situation had come about and that new guidance was being issued to all health authorities in Wales laying responsibility on them.

I remember an outbreak of anthrax on Singret farm, just outside the village of Llay, near Wrexham. The Welsh Office was intent on prosecuting the farmer for allowing slurry to run over the land around the farm, but the Committee was able to persuade the then Secretary of State, now Lord Walker, to pay compensation, purely as a one-off ex gratia payment, of £600,000 to the farmer, to enable him to carry on with the essential work of clearing up the major problem on his pig farm.

Rechem International, now owned by Shanks and McEwan, presented an interesting problem because of the incineration of polychlorinated biphenyls at the plant in Pontypool. For many years, there was a running battle between the company and the community of New Inn around the incinerator.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) and I were delighted to be able to persuade the Welsh Office to take a major step forward in setting up an independent monitoring system under the august leadership of Professor Lewis Roberts, the eminent chemist at the university of East Anglia. That enabled people to be confident that the emissions did not pose any further significant health risks.

We enjoyed considering planning in the open countryside. We examined six authorities in detail, with pride of place perhaps going to Ceredigion. The way in which it carried out its planning decisions was novel, if I say no more. The view of the chairman of planning was that the Welsh Office had the utmost cheek to interfere in any way by issuing so-called circulars and Acts of Parliament.

We were able to persuade the Welsh Office that the hundreds of houses in the open countryside in Wales, flouting all its circulars and legislation, were a matter to which it should pay some attention. I am delighted that it has at least gone a little way towards preventing the continuation of such a situation, although even this week we were alerted by the Welsh Office local authority commissioner to certain planning applications that are still being decided on the personality of the applicant rather than on planning grounds.

The Secretary of State painted a wonderful picture of the quality of Welsh bathing beaches. European Community directive 160 was introduced in 1976, under a Labour Government, but Conservative Governments subsequently, for as long as 10 years, interpreted the definition of bathing beaches in such a way that there was not one in Wales, and

[Mr. Gareth Wardell]

only nine in England, so of course there was no need in Wales to apply the rules on the Escherichia coli and the faecal coliforms specified in the directive.

When the Secretary of State waxes lyrical about the quality of Welsh bathing beaches, he seems to assume that every beach in Wales is a bathing beach. In practice, there are 51 defined bathing beaches in Wales—the so-called Euro-beaches—but many more are not so defined under the directive.

Mr. Richards: The hon. Gentleman has been a distinguished Chairman of the Welsh Affairs Committee, and I for one shall miss him when he departs the House after the general election. He was saying how effective the Committee has been as a watchdog on the Government. Does he agree that it is a great shame that those who watch the affairs of the House in some detail, and write and comment on them, have not paid more attention to the Committee and to how effective it has been over the years? Perhaps he would like to comment on the need for a Welsh Assembly in the light of how effective the Committee has been.

Mr. Wardell: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman looks at the Committee's work in that way. The critical factor about a Welsh Assembly will be whether its presence will lead to improved government for Wales and to more jobs, better housing and better health. In the referendum campaign it will be crucial for those arguments to be demonstrated, because if they cannot be demonstrated the whole exercise will have to be called into question. I look forward to a vigorous assessment.

The Welsh Affairs Committee had to examine the proposed closure of Mynydd Mawr hospital in Tumble—the village I was brought up in, where my father has been the village barber for 64 years—where my mother was an auxiliary nurse and where my sister was a patient for some time.

When the former East Dyfed health authority had the gall to issue a consultation paper the quality of which was so low as to insult the intelligence of the local people, the Committee visited Tumble and was appalled to find that the chief nursing officer of the health authority had never visited the hospital, although he was in large part responsible for drawing up the consultation document.

The quality of this month's Dyfed Powys health authority document shows that it has not learnt the lessons of the old East Dyfed health authority. It is prepared to issue consultation documents that again insult the intelligence of local people. The health authority employs 164 people. If this is the best it can do, we must ask seriously whether the Welsh Office should take over the commissioning of health services there. If this is the quality that it is prepared to deliver, I agree with the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery that the whole board should be dismissed immediately and someone who knows what quality means should be put at the helm.

I want to consider three or four major points in the document to illustrate the points of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery to ensure that the House understands what is at stake. Like him, I am a member of the General Medical Council and I find it distressing that a health authority should issue such a document. Paragraph 3.3 on page 3 summarises seven jobs of the health authority. The first is assessing health needs. The sixth job that it says it does is to

"evaluate how we are progressing".

Nowhere in the document is there any attempt to assess the extent to which health needs are being met.

To take the example of diabetes—I am proud to be the chairman of all-party diabetic group—the health authority has little idea of the incidence the disease. That was admitted by the Secretary of State for Health when I put that point to him on the Floor two weeks ago. How can the health authority measure what progress is being made to meet the health care needs of diabetic patients in Dyfed Powys when it does not even know how many people with that problem reside there? I could repeat the point across the board, but for it to claim that it is assessing needs when, abysmally, it does not have the necessary information, is the utmost cheek.

In the fourth paragraph on page 17, the authority talks about clinical effectiveness. The report states:

"Next year we will review one area of clinical practice which is not considered effective. We will then decide either to purchase a significantly reduced level of this service or not purchase it at all."

It does not say which area of clinical practice. It has not yet considered the effectiveness of any area of clinical practice, yet that is its function. Why wait until next year when it can do it now? There are 164 people employed in the health authority, which is charged with purchasing health services for its people based on clinical effectiveness, and it is to be done next year. That is its job, but it is not doing it.

Page 23 deals with maternity services and says that Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists guidelines state that a consultant-led unit should deal with a minimum of 2,000 births per annum, but the document uses the 1983 figures. In a consultation document, the authority cannot tell us how many births there were in Dyfed Powys in each of its hospitals in 1996. Is the health authority so indolent that it cannot be bothered to find out? It does not have the figures for live births for 1993 in Withybush hospital, only those for West Wales general hospital and Bronglais.

My next point makes me more angry than any of the others and was again mentioned by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery. The Government say that they are committed to community care, but paragraph 16 shows that the health authority is, like the Welsh Office, trying to get the trust to do its dirty work. It does not name the community hospitals that are to be closed; it says that it will leave it to the trusts to decide. The Welsh Office put that system in place and it is its responsibility to ensure that the system is made to work. The Secretary of State appointed the chairman and the non-executive directors of the health authority, which says that it is prepared to support the closure of up to eight community hospitals.

The crucial point that makes me more angry than anything else is the farce—I put it no higher—of the Government's handling of the discharge of patients from hospital and the social care plans drawn up for them. I have seen frail elderly people who have had strokes and major surgery who are in no position to understand a social care plan, for which they have to ask before they can see it. The farce is that social care plans are supposed to identify—this affects not only elderly people, but others

who are discharged into the community, such as the mentally ill—how much physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, chiropody or community dentistry is needed. The Government know that there are not enough people in Wales to do that work and fulfil the social care plans.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I may not have enough time to deal with all the hon. Gentleman's remarks later, so at this important point I should tell him that we will publish shortly—in the next week or so—our assessment of those services in relation to at least three parts of Wales. While he is working himself up into a lather because the provisions are not operating properly, he should recognise that we have an inspectorate to examine operations on the ground. We believe that that information should be put into the public domain, as it soon will be.

Mr. Wardell: I am pleased to hear that, but I do not have confidence that it can be delivered. When the Committee considered severe head injury rehabilitation, we visited the homes of people in different parts of Wales. It was plain that the physiotherapy and occupational therapy that they needed was not available because not enough therapists have been attracted into the health service in Wales to deal with them. If there are not enough physiotherapists in an area, it is a farce to put into a social care plan that someone needs two physiotherapy sessions of two hours a week—or that people with diabetes need a chiropodist every month because they have feet problems.

It is a farce when somebody in the House has to say, "The King is in the altogether. He is as naked as the day that he was born." What is happening—I see it when I go around—is that people are languishing in their homes because the physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and chiropodists are not available. Some manpower planning is necessary. If the Government would say openly, "We agree that there is a huge gap," people would know when they are given social care plans that their delivery is impossible.

I shall finish by saying a few words about dentistry. The Government and dentists have been on a collision course for some time. People do not realise that deregistration can now take place after 15 months. As from this month, there is a difference between what dentists and general medical practitioners may do. People registered with a dentist can be deregistered after 15 months. That is happening in large numbers, and it has important consequences.

If a person is not registered with a dentist, the dentist owes them no duty of care. That is rarely an issue for people until they experience pain of dental origin, but when it occurs they have great difficulty obtaining immediate treatment. The usual chain of events is that a person in excruciating pain, who no longer has an NHS dentist, rings around the area to find a dentist who will take him or her on.

I received a letter this week from my dentist saying that he is no longer prepared to treat me as an NHS patient. He gave me the option of joining BUPA or being treated by him privately. If I were not in a position to pay—fortunately, I am—either BUPA or for the private plan that my dentist has given me, I would turn to my doctor, who would prescribe me analgesics or antibiotics, or I would turn up at the hospital casualty department, but analgesics and antibiotics do not deal with the fundamental cause of pain. GPs are already under great stress, and their problems will be exacerbated by patients turning up at their surgeries, and major casualty departments will have serious difficulties unless they have a maxilla-facial department with doctors and dentists on call. People in great pain inevitably take time off work, which has economic consequences.

The Government have driven the dental profession to leave the national health service on a large scale and the people of Wales now find it extremely difficult to find a dentist with whom they can register. I hope that, when he winds up, the Minister will say that the community dental service will be expanded in Wales as a safety net to ensure that the scenario that I have described will not come about.

Sir Raymond Powell: You said at the start of your speech that you are retiring at the general election. As you are an hon. Friend of mine, I wish to say that the speech that you have just delivered is a classic. We have always come and listened to your speeches—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order.

Sir Raymond Powell: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I wish you well for the future. The House is grateful for your contribution to Welsh debates and to the Welsh Affairs Committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that I have just proved that my tolerance has no end.

Mr. Wardell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind words.

I hope that the Secretary of State for Wales will consult closely the Secretary of State for Social Security to ensure that Benefit Agency offices in Wales do not close. It will be a disgrace if elderly and vulnerable people are denied first-class information on the benefits that they can receive. Indeed, closure would be a severe blow to many of them.

It has been a pleasure to chair the Welsh Affairs Committee. I see around me many right hon. and hon. Members from all political parties who have served that Committee well, and I am grateful to them. They have all, whichever side of the Chamber they sit on, become my friends, and I am delighted that that has happened. The right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) has been a stalwart in the Committee since he joined it, and we have worked extremely well together. I say that with great respect. I have watched the right hon. Gentleman carefully over the years, and learnt quite a few lessons from seeing the balance that he has brought to many debates.

I wish to thank the three Clerks, who are still in the House—David Harrison, Mark Hutton and Philippa Helme—and the staff who have supported them. The work that any Select Committee does relies heavily on its support staff.

It is with, in a sense, regret that the one job I have thoroughly enjoyed since I have been in the House is chairing the Welsh Affairs Committee. I hope that whoever takes over will do as good a job as our former Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East

[Mr. Wardell]

(Mr. Anderson). I learnt a lot from him. Before him, there was Mr. Leo Abse, who was famous in the House, and we all learnt a great deal from him, too.

Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

8.6 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): It is a great honour and privilege to follow the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) tonight. This has been a strange debate, because we have listened to three speeches from hon. Members who will leave the House at the next election: the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts); the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile); and the hon. Member for Gower. Reference has been made to their contributions not only to the House but to Welsh politics.

It is also right to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Gower for the part that he has played as Chairman of the Welsh Affairs Select Committee. Those of us who had the privilege of serving with him on the Committee will remember the tremendous attention to detail that he displayed in all his work. We wish him well in his occupation once he leaves the House.

This has been an interesting debate for members of Plaid Cymru tonight. Two hon. Members—one from either side of the House—have devoted a large part of their speeches to the policy that my party espouses. I did not agree with their interpretation of that policy, but it has been a privilege and honour to listen to other people talking about it.

I drew an analysis of the time spent by the hon. Member for Clwyd, North–West (Mr. Richards) when he discussed my party in the debate on the constitution on 20 February, and he did exactly the same tonight. He spent 19 minutes discussing Plaid Cymru, and a mere seven minutes discussing the other Opposition party. It is clear where he thinks opposition to him will come at the next election.

The hon. Gentleman made an interesting and remarkable speech on 20 February, and I shall concentrate on one aspect of it—it would be impossible to deal with all of it in a short speech, because it was so full of inaccuracies. He spoke of Wales's position within the European Union and its entitlement to structural funds from the European Union. That point was alluded to by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies).

I shall do the hon. Member for Clwyd, North–West the honour of quoting his speech on 20 February. He said that Wales does not qualify for funding under the objective 1 criteria that currently pertain, and added:

> "Indeed, that status reflects a level of economic deprivation that I would not like to see inflicted on any part of Wales."—[*Official Report*, 20 February 1997; Vol. 290, c. 1114.]

The sad fact is that his party has inflicted it on parts of Wales. Some parts of Wales now have the lowest income levels of any country in the British Isles, and some of the lowest in western Europe.

We have to get one fact relating to European funding absolutely straight: two areas of Wales would qualify under the current criteria. The old counties of Gwynedd and Dyfed easily qualify under those criteria, as do the old coal mining areas of south Wales. The old coal mining valleys of Glamorgan would qualify and, if one included the coal mining valleys of Gwent, south Wales would still be a borderline case. Under the criteria adopted in 1993, both would have received objective 1 funds. The reason why we did not secure those funds is that the Welsh Office did not adopt what I would describe as a robust negotiating position when those matters were discussed in Brussels.

Welsh Office Ministers tell us that they do not want Wales to qualify under objective 1—that was the tone of the remarks of the hon. Member for Clwyd, North–West and of the Secretary of State during the last Welsh Office Questions. Yet Department of Trade and Industry Ministers were not reticent about parts of England qualifying for objective 1 status; nor were Scottish Office Ministers reticent about parts of Scotland qualifying for objective 1 status.

Scottish Office Ministers went to Brussels, argued their case and secured objective 1 status for the highlands and islands of Scotland; and the Deputy Prime Minister argued the case for Merseyside to be granted objective 1 status. At the same time, the counties of Gwynedd and Dyfed and the valleys of south Wales had an equal claim to qualification for objective 1 status, but the Welsh Office hardly put up a case in Brussels. Those are the facts.

What are the criteria? Let me put them on the record: if an area has less than 75 per cent. per capita of the average EU gross domestic product, it qualifies. The two counties on the western seaboard of Wales therefore qualify, although the old coal mining areas have slightly over the qualifying percentage, at perhaps 76 per cent. or 77 per cent. of average EU GDP. One would have thought that it would be in the interests of Wales to get the increased funding that objective 1 status brings. Ministers tell us that we are talking about an odd £100 million here and there, but the truth is that the extra funding is far greater than that.

I have never claimed that the whole of Wales would qualify for objective 1 status, so the comparison with Ireland is not fair, because the whole of Ireland qualified—or did it? I looked at the figures, and found that it barely qualified. The highlands and islands of Scotland do not technically qualify, because they exceed the 75 per cent. mark, and neither does Merseyside, for the same reason. The fact is that nobody made the case for Wales when these matters were being discussed. It may well be that we can argue about the figures, but what is not arguable is the loss that Wales has suffered as a result of the failure to secure that funding.

We have heard that Ireland benefits substantially from objective 1 status—with a population of around 3.5 million, it receives about £5 billion over five years. With a population of 2.8 million, Wales receives about a tenth of that sum. Would Wales have received substantially more if we had secured objective 1 status? I have calculated that, over five years, the loss to Wales resulting from the failure to secure objective 1 status is about £1 billion. That is a substantial sum.

We have also heard that we might have benefited from cohesion funds, for which Wales would easily qualify. The qualifying standard in that respect is 90 per cent. of GDP, whereas Wales has only 83 per cent.

Mr. Denzil Davies: The hon. Gentleman says that Wales would easily qualify for cohesion funds, but that would be true only if Wales was a member of the Council of Ministers. Is that the proposition he is advancing?

Mr. Jones: Of course, the hon. Gentleman is correct. Under the current rules, only member states can qualify for cohesion funds—but why were cohesion funds established in the first place? They were established because the European Union decided that it was important to have social and economic cohesion in the run-up to economic and monetary union.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: No, I listened to the hon. Gentleman, and he must now listen to me.

My point is that the Maastricht treaty contained a specific commitment to social and economic cohesion; accompanying that was a recognition that there would be parts of the European Union that would need assistance to qualify under the strict convergence criteria, which were extremely monetarist in tone. What emerged from negotiations by the Commission and from European Union guidelines was that structural funds were doubled over a period, so as to assist those poorer and peripheral regions. The money was devoted to helping countries such as Wales to qualify, yet Wales gets not a single penny piece more under the regional funds from 1994–99 than we received under the previous regime.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: No, I have given way once; I will not give way again. I must finish my point.

The reason why structural funds were increased so substantially was to help countries such as Wales and Scotland and the poorer regions of England.

Mr. Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: No, I have made it perfectly clear that I will not give way. The right hon. Gentleman has already had the opportunity to develop his arguments.

Mr. Davies: This is a debate.

Mr. Jones: I did give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Davies: Once.

Mr. Jones: Once is enough in the present circumstances.

The structural funds that were devoted to regions such as Wales should have come to Wales. It is a bogus argument to say that Wales would not qualify when it patently does.

There is one other difficulty in relation to regional funding, which is that the way in which Wales is divided for regional fund purposes means that we would not have qualified under the old rules. In other words, the nomenclature of territorial units for statistics II areas divided Wales into two regions, not four. The problem with that is that, as north-west Wales and north-east Wales are joined, and there is a similar pattern in south Wales, the western seaboard of Wales or the valleys of south Wales could not qualify. The Welsh Office has recognised that difficulty, and the Commission is to consider redrawing the map of Wales for European Union funding purposes. Let us hope that this time the Welsh Office gets it right; it will receive Opposition Members' support to ensure that that happens.

There is a clear case for designating the western seaboard of Wales a special region, because it already has Interreg funding. Nonsensically, under the Interreg initiative, the western seaboard of Wales will collect about £10 million over five years, whereas the eastern seaboard of Ireland will receive £70 million. The difference in population accounts for part of the difference, but the main difference is that that part of Ireland has objective 1 status, whereas we have objective 5b status. That is grossly unfair, and even under the current system it is possible for us to ensure that objective 1 status applies to the western seaboard of Wales.

We know that the Commissioner for Regional Policy in Brussels is considering ways of changing the operation of regional funding; she is saying that regional funding will be far more concentrated in years to come. She wants smaller areas to benefit; funding will be more focused. Wales, as it is currently organised and constituted for funding, would lose even more under that system. To ensure that the parts of Wales that should benefit are taken into account, we must bear those factors in mind during renegotiation of regional policy—which will be necessary as we seek expansion into eastern Europe.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In relation to the next reclassification, which the hon. Gentleman knows is currently a matter to be considered, the area he mentioned covers Clwyd, Dyfed, Gwynedd and Powys. Is he saying that Clwyd and Powys should be separated from Dyfed and Gwynedd, and therefore should not have the best opportunity of participating in bids for European funding? Is that his argument?

Mr. Jones: I did not say that; what I said was clear. The western seaboard of Wales already secures Interreg funding. That area, taken together, would qualify for objective 1 status. The Minister knows well that parts of Clwyd and Powys would qualify, as they currently do, under objective 5b. He also knows well that neither Clwyd nor Powys would qualify for objective 1. I am asking the Welsh Office to argue the case to maximise the benefit for Wales—objective 1 in parts of Wales and objective 5b in other parts of Wales. That is what he should argue for.

Under the scheme that I have proposed, no part of Wales would lose, but more areas would benefit.

I conclude by addressing an important fact that is close to the Minister's heart, and that I hope he comments on when he winds up tonight—the need for us to get cracking with setting up an agri-environmental scheme for the whole of Wales. He knows that it has been said that the Tir Cymen scheme is wonderful. The environmentally sensitive areas that we are developing—the best bits of Tir Cymen—are being taken on board. We also have several other small agri-environmental schemes.

[Mr. Jones]

I was very surprised to hear the Secretary of State talk about the review of Tir Cymen. I should have thought that we have now had a good deal of experience of that scheme, which is very beneficial and is welcomed by farmers. Five years ago, farmers probably would not have embraced Tir Cymen as they have, and we would not have witnessed the developments in the environmentally sensitive area schemes.

The time has come for the Welsh Office to make up its mind. Is it in favour of an all-Wales scheme? If so, how will such a scheme be funded—may we be told today? We know that an analysis by Professor Gareth Wyn Jones says that the net cost of that scheme would be about £20 million to £25 million. Does the Welsh Office agree? It is very important for Welsh farmers especially to know before the general election the position of the Conservative party and the Government on that issue, and I hope that the Minister will have something to say about that.

8.25 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): In today's debate there has been an end-of-term feeling, with three Members—the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts), the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell)—probably making their final contribution to our annual Welsh day debate. I add to the tributes that hon. Members have paid to their invaluable contributions to our debates over the years, and wish them well in their future careers, be they in the other place or elsewhere.

I want to discuss devolution. To emphasise the end-of-term feeling, this will be the last speech, as it were, by a Member representing the Carmarthen constituency. It is an historic constituency, which has produced many surprises at general elections, but at the next general election it splits. There will be two Members—both Labour, we hope—one for Carmarthen West and Pembrokeshire South, and myself as the candidate for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr.

Were it not for the Carmarthen constituency, the subject of devolution might not have been debated as vigorously as it has been in the past few months—or as vigorously as it will be in the next few months. In a by-election in 1966, Carmarthen returned the first nationalist Member of Parliament, Gwynfor Evans. That was a sea change in Celtic politics because, within a year, at a by-election in Scotland, the first Scottish nationalist Member was returned, and between 1970 and 1974 the nationalist parties peaked at a total of 12 or 14 Members of Parliament.

At about that time, the Conservative and Labour parties thought much about the constitution, and whether it should take account of the call for greater say in our government in Wales and in Scotland. I have been very much affected by such arguments. My regular contestants are the Conservative and Welsh national parties; I take an interest in what they say, and must rebut their arguments.

My commitment to devolution predates the 1966 by-election in Carmarthen. As a young student at Oxford, I attended a Liberal club meeting on decentralisation. I cannot remember whether Jo Grimond or Jeremy Thorpe spoke, but I do remember being very impressed generally by the arguments made that evening—that Britain has a uniquely centralist form of government, that in every country in Europe and most countries worldwide, there is much stronger local or regional government, and that it would be sensible if, in our structures, more power was devolved to the regions.

I have always thought of devolution to Wales and Scotland in the wider context of regional government throughout Britain. Over the years, the system that I have come to admire is the German lander system, which allows strong local government. Some of the lander are controlled by the SPD, some by the Christian Democrats and some by Green-SPD alliances. The Liberal party and the FBT are also involved. I should like to see a similar form of government evolve in Britain.

I did not join the Labour party until 1977. I was not politically active until then. In 1977, however, it was very much our policy to set up assemblies for Wales and Scotland, and in 1979 I worked hard on the campaign to establish an assembly in Wales. Unfortunately, the result of that campaign was strong opposition to such an assembly—and we felt that during the campaign, even in Carmarthen, in south Wales. It was difficult to persuade our party members to work for the campaign. Nevertheless, as the Government will recognise by the end of the year, opinion has changed profoundly.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman—who was obviously involved in that campaign, as I was—recalls that, some time before the campaign started, opinion polls were saying that people in Wales were in favour of an assembly. In fact, the *Western Mail* published the result of a poll to that effect. What the hon. Gentleman is describing is the way in which opinion changed during the referendum campaign itself. Does he share that view?

Mr. Williams: I accept that. Before the referendum, many opinion polls were very encouraging, in that they indicated support for an assembly. What they did not take into account was the party's opposition at grass-roots level, which is a statistical fact.

During the 1980s, the feeling changed substantially, mainly because of a succession of Conservative Governments. The people of Wales and Scotland are left of centre, and the fact that we have had 18 years of Conservative rule has been deeply frustrating for them. They feel that, if there were a Parliament in Edinburgh and an assembly in Cardiff, those bodies would act as bulwarks against the excesses of Conservative Governments.

Another reason for the change of feeling is the Conservative party's treatment of quangos—the increase in their budgets and their powers, and, more particularly, the way in which their membership has been manipulated so that the people of Wales are not represented. That is true at all levels: it applies to trusts, the Welsh Development Agency and the development board. Conservative placemen are put in charge of the whole plethora of quangos, and people have become very cynical about their composition.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) made some excellent comments about Dyfed Powys health authority. The Minister is currently

a victim of one of its directives—or, at least, of a consultative paper. The authority seems to have no accountability. I do not quite echo the hon. and learned Gentleman's call for the resignation of its members, but I certainly think that the document should be scrapped, and that the authority should return to square one. As a quango, it illustrates the democratic deficit.

A third reason for the sea change in public opinion is that the last four Secretaries of State for Wales have not come from Wales. Lord Crickhowell, formerly Member of Parliament for Pembroke, was not very popular, and did not have a typically Welsh personality; none the less, he was from Wales, and represented a Welsh constituency.

I am not anti-English, and I acknowledge the validity of the West Lothian question, but there is something curious about the fact that the last four Secretaries of State have been the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) and his predecessors the right hon. Members for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and the former Members of Parliament for Wirral and for Worcester. None of them was elected by any of the people of Wales, yet they have run the Welsh Office. The current Secretary of State is affable and able, and has many good qualities, but why should he decide how much should be spent on health, social services and highways in Wales, and where bypasses in Wales should be built? He has only got to know Wales in the past three or four years.

I know that our policy in favour of an assembly for Wales is not robust enough for some elements of Welsh public opinion. That obviously applies to the Welsh national party, and it may apply to some members of the Labour and Liberal parties. In the past 15 years, however, we have sincerely tried to develop a consensus—a policy on which the people of Wales can unite.

That consensus will achieve two main objectives. First, it will democratise the Welsh Office, so that decisions currently taken without accountability by civil servants working under the Secretary of State's direction will be discussed much more thoroughly. Such a forum will lead to better decision-making. Secondly, it will allow us to make quangos more accountable.

Later this year, once we have a Labour Government again, there will be referendums. By autumn, there will have been referendums in Wales and Scotland. It is often forgotten that we also propose an all-London body to take over the responsibilities of the old Greater London council—again, subject to a referendum. We propose proportional representation, or a strong element of it, to provide a wider base and more accurately reflect the political geography of Wales.

I see the assemblies in Wales and London, and the Parliament in Scotland, as part of a much more long-term trend. Once the Scottish Assembly has been established—within three to five years—the north-east and north-west of England will no doubt demand their own assemblies, again subject to referendums, and those assemblies should be granted. In the next 10 years, under continuing Labour or Liberal-Labour Governments, the people of the south-east, the south and East Anglia will begin to look at what is happening in the north and in Scotland, and will think, "We could have a Tory-controlled assembly in our area." They will realise that the powers that those other bodies have are very proper, and gradually, over 10 or 20 years, we shall move towards that lander system in which governments share power. Central Government will remain at Westminster, but there will, very properly, be a regional tier.

I was encouraged, although not surprised, by what the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said last Sunday. I watched the interview live on Sunday morning, and I was impressed by his comments. Of course, he has more time to examine the issues than the rest of us. I have a transcript of what he said. First, there was his put-down of what the Prime Minister had said about breaking the nation: he said how absurd that was.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: May I put the record straight? The hon. Gentleman may recall that, when the last Labour Government presented a Bill to introduce evolution, a number of Labour Members voted against it or abstained. Five Conservatives voted with the Labour party, one of whom was my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). He has held that view for a number of years.

Mr. Williams: Absolutely. He has been consistent on many issues over the years. I respect him greatly for that, and for his judgment. History might have been quite different if he had been around during the last 20 years. This is what he said last Sunday morning:

"If we"—

a Conservative Government—

"had been returned in 1974, we would have gone ahead with it, because we believed it was for the good of the UK as well as of Scotland . . . We gave this system to Canada, we gave it to Australia, we gave it to South Africa, we gave it to Central Africa, we gave it to the Caribbean, and with the Americans and the French we gave it to Germany."

Handled clumsily, regional government, a strong regional tier, could threaten to split the United Kingdom; but handled properly, and in an evolutionary way, it would markedly improve the government of the United Kingdom.

8.39 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) in commending the contribution to the House of the three hon. Members who have spoken in the debate, who are to retire. We heard three remarkable valedictory speeches. Each of those hon. Members is a very considerable parliamentarian, with different contributions. One was a Minister of long standing on the Conservative Benches. Another is a distinguished lawyer, who has brought his experience and expertise in the law very effectively to the House. Finally, there is my good friend and neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell), who is a much more distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs than was his predecessor.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gower has shown tonight that he has a great grasp of detail of the Welsh scene. I was interested in what he and the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) said about the recent initiative of the chairman of Dyfed Powys health authority. I hope that, given the consensus in certain areas of the debate, I can make a proposal that will be accepted

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

by both sides of the House. If the Government sack the chairman of Dyfed Powys health authority, a good and obvious successor would be a gentleman who still lives in the area of the health authority, who hails from Tumble—whether upper or lower Tumble, I am not sure—and who will reside in Carmarthen, teaching at the college there. Therefore, I formally propose to the House that my hon. Friend the Member for Gower should become chairman of Dyfed Powys health authority.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Do we have a seconder?

Mr. Anderson: Perhaps you will accept my motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

More seriously, I wish to make two points. I shall not ask the Minister for an answer tonight, but I respectfully urge him to examine demand-led element funding within the further education sector, and the impact that removal of that funding would have on further education in Wales. That matter is causing great concern in Wales. I understand that a decision is imminent. Perhaps he will write to me about it.

We had a debate in the House on 19 February, during which only English Members spoke, mainly from the north-west. The situation in Wales, however, is very different. In my judgment, there should be a Welsh solution to the problem, which would not result in exceeding existing budgets. The Minister will know that DLE funding in Wales has been used to enable mainstream growth in FE for the 16 to 19 age group, and, more important in some ways, to widen participation for adults. There is not a franchise problem in Wales, as there is in England.

I commend the Government for their initiative on DLE funding, which has enabled extra, cost-effective growth. For example, in the current year, DLE payments will reach £4.5 million, which will result in an extra 20,000 students. Swansea college—first under the distinguished but just retired principal, Cyril Lewis, and now under principal Keith Elliott—has the Eastside initiative, which particularly helps disadvantaged groups in my constituency. I opened the Morriston office of the Eastside initiative. It is reaching out to groups that would not otherwise come into contact with continuing education.

Swansea college is already 22 per cent. above target. The result of removing DLE for 1997–98 would be a severe reduction of provision, affecting 16 to 19-year-old students, and particularly the wider groups of adults who have been so beneficially affected by the Eastside initiative in my constituency.

In Wales, it cannot seriously be argued by the Government that the DLE is out of control. Wales is not three years in arrears, as in England. The FE sector in Wales has achieved controlled growth in the number of students since 1993. In my view, there should be a Welsh solution in the Welsh Office to the problem, which is essentially different from that in England. As the Minister will know, principals in FE colleges have a four-year cycle. There is now a real danger—the problem is imminent—that DLE funding will be removed, which would have a major and adverse affect.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): There is a unique Welsh institution in my constituency, St. David's college, which is the only sixth form college in Wales. The principal tells me that each student at that college receives between £400 and £500 less than students in similar English institutions, that it had to bear a 14 per cent. cut in funding last year, and that it will have to bear a cut of 19 per cent. in the next three years, even though it is very successful and is educating more students each year.

Mr. Anderson: And it is doing what the Government want, in terms of extending education in that key group. My hon. Friend makes a similar point to mine.

I understand that the Welsh Office was originally sympathetic to the continuation of the scheme, but the problem arose when English authorities and the English Department for Education and Employment became involved and suggested that there should not be a Welsh solution. Our problems are difficult, but with good will, surely we can provide a solution within Wales. I do not expect an answer when the Minister winds up, but I hope that he will respond seriously to the real problem that FE colleges face. What is the purpose of the Welsh Office, if it cannot take independent decisions on matters that affect Wales? I hope that we are not carried in the slipstream of England in such matters, when our problems are fundamentally different.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen and the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) mentioned the Welsh question. There is indeed a Welsh question. It is sad that in last Thursday's debate on the constitution, only four of my Welsh colleagues were able to speak. We felt somewhat marginalised, as if it was a case of for Wales read England, or, perhaps, for Wales read Scotland.

I shall comment on the themes that the Government put forward in respect of their absolutist, no-change policy. The Prime Minister said that the debate should be the start of a great debate on the constitution. I have been around for some time, and recall that, after the defeat of the proposal of the Labour Government of 1974–79, the then Secretary of State for Wales, now Lord Crickhowell, made a similar proposal for a great debate. He talked about the possibility of a Welsh council, and the need for a strategic group within Wales. The idea may have been flawed, but at least it was speedily forgotten.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The hon. Gentleman is right. I recall Lord Crickhowell saying at that time that he did not think that the 1979 vote was the end of the debate. That vote had its effect on the political parties. For instance, Plaid Cymru, which believes in independence for Wales, had virtually two lines on devolution in its 1979 manifesto. There is no doubt that the result was regarded as a sea change, even though it is right to remark on the fact that Lord Crickhowell said that the debate should continue.

Mr. Anderson: It was the elephant on the doorstep: no one can gainsay that. But Lord Crickhowell made a pledge to initiate a debate. I merely ask: what is the Government's motive in seeking to raise this debate now? Are they not indulging in the politics of fear? As we approach the election, the Government are trying to wrap themselves in a flag. That is the essence of a unionist party. They want to bang the anti-foreign drum, especially on Europe, and to wrap themselves in the flag on Scotland and Wales. They are, in effect, reducing themselves to an English national party. It is not serious or credible politics.

Amid the debates about constitutional change, it is sad that the Government have set their face against any form of change. That contrasts with the 1970s, when many hon. Members who are now on the Government Benches were openly saying that problems of governance had to be addressed. There is a range of problems: the House of Lords, the incorporation of the European convention on human rights, our voting system and the governance of Wales and Scotland. It is incredible that the governing party takes an absolutist no position on all those major issues.

That is not how our constitution evolved. When problems arise, our political system usually evolves to accommodate them. Like it or not, there is a Scottish question, and, to a lesser extent, a Welsh question. It is absurd that the Conservative party has traditionally set itself against any change until that change becomes a tradition. We saw that happen with the Welsh Development Agency and with the Welsh Office.

Another of the Government's themes is their argument that devolution will lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. Failure to recognise the Scottish problem and the Welsh problem is more likely to lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. It is insulting to say that the people of Wales and Scotland are so politically unsophisticated that a degree of decentralisation, and an exercise in democratic control over the cluster of administrative bodies in Edinburgh and in Cardiff, will inevitably lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom, whereas Catalonia, Rhône-Alpes and the other motor regions that the Welsh Office and the Government want to link up with can have experiments in decentralisation without people fearing that those countries will break up. Germany has the länder: because of its history, Bavaria is different from Nordrhein Westphalia. There is devolution à la carte in Spain, where Catalonia is more prosperous and has a more developed sense of identity than Valencia.

There are different models. History will find the Government funny peculiar in saying that, despite all these great debates, we cannot have any change. In the 1970s, the Conservative party was prepared seriously to enter into a debate to address real problems. Now there is a total veto and it rejects any change.

Alas, last Thursday and now, Conservative Members have parroted the West Lothian question as if its mere repetition will end the argument. Of course it is a serious question, and I concede that at one level it is unanswerable. It should be put in the context of the problem, and we should seek to address that problem, with all the disadvantages that may indeed flow. We should also take into account the Northern Irish precedent, and the possibility of an English Grand Committee.

I accept that that may mean moving to a quasi-federal solution. Everyone accepts that the proposed changes for Scotland and Wales are a transitional position, and that they will move in different ways. There may be English assemblies. At least there will be a debate on the nature of our constitution. We should not be frightened into saying that at the end of the road the United Kingdom will be broken up. The objective is to allow ordinary people to have a greater say in the governance of their country.

I played a role in the 1970s debate. At that time I was, on balance, against the proposals of my own party, and I voted consistently against them. I am now, on balance, in favour of my party's proposals. I do not pretend in an absolutist way that there are not advantages and disadvantages: as with all political problems, there are pros and cons.

I shall mention the factors that have induced me to change my mind—I shall just give the headlines because of the time. The first factor is the Thatcherite centralisation and the removal or neutering of the intermediary bodies between the state and the citizen, such as local government, which has been put in a greater financial straitjacket, and the trade unions. I have already mentioned the European dimension. I envisage a cluster of institutions in Brussels, another in London and another in Cardiff, each with its own form of democratic control. The second factor is the identity of Wales, which I believe is of value and should be enhanced by a Welsh Assembly.

I am not alone in changing my position. I read the interesting interview with David Waterstone in the *Western Mail*, which I thought was extremely significant. I recently met a senior business man who is known to many of us. He told me that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) was the missionary who converted him to devolution. When the right hon. Gentleman slashed the grant to the Countryside Commission for Wales by half, and there was nothing we could do about it—we had no say, and there was no accountability—that business man began to ask various questions about the governance of Wales.

Quangos have been used ruthlessly by the Government, who cannot win by democratic means. They have filled them with their placemen. I shall not mention poor Dr. Gwyn Jones—my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) has been doing a demolition job on the learned doctor for some time. The man who is now the Conservative candidate for Worcester is an able and likeable man, but he had hardly arrived in my city before he was put on a health authority. Many people were born and brought up there and have served the city well, but they have no serious prospect of getting on the Conservative quango. That sort of thing annoys ordinary, right-thinking people, who may not be politically minded otherwise.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Was the hon. Gentleman here when the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) said how balanced the board of the Welsh Development Agency was, because it had trade union and local government representatives, and all the rest of it?

Mr. Anderson: This is something of a death-bed repentance. If I and the Minister, who is a reasonable man, except when he speaks from the Front Bench, were to have a cup of tea and to consider the history of Conservative appointments to the Welsh Development Agency, the pattern until now and the recent change, we would both come to the same conclusion, which would not be encouraging to the Government.

Another factor is that there is now an increasing feeling of togetherness in Wales and the building of a Welsh community and identity, partly—and I commend the Government for this—because of their Welsh Language Act 1993, which has been a positive development. Language could be so divisive in Wales, as it is in places such as Belgium. Historians will give great credit to the Government for the Act, which builds on consensus and has helped to remove part of the potential divisiveness within the Welsh polity.

[Mr. Anderson]

I hope that the assembly will develop Welsh consciousness, which is, alas, all too lacking in our present age. I have a nightmare of a Murdoch-run age, with everyone speaking in mid-atlantic accents and watching the same shows. There is some value in diversity, which I hope the assembly will reflect.

That is why I applaud the form of proportional representation that has been proposed by the Labour party. The proposal starts from the basis that there should be a reasonable number of Members—60 Members—and that the electoral areas should be well known. That is why we have selected the Westminster constituencies and the Euro-constituencies. It also accepts that there should be an attempt to include everyone in Wales, and hence to ensure that people from each part of Wales are represented in the new assembly, according to the strength of their party. That is a good starting point. In so far as electoral systems can have consequences, that will be a means of bringing the diversity of Wales together.

In that context, I find the attitude of Plaid Cymru puzzling. It is being coy and says that we cannot count on its support in the referendum. Is it a party, or is it a pressure group? Is it trying to be serious, or is it playing games? It must know that, historically, a chance to make a change of this substance comes only once in a generation or so.

Think back to 1966, when the Welsh Office was formed. Some people said, "This is such a puny creature. We do not want it. People might vote against it." Let us compare the Welsh Office of today to the Welsh Office of 1966. It has moved sensibly, with additions by the Government and by my party, according to the wishes of the people of Wales, and at the speed that they wanted.

It is absolutely absurd for Plaid Cymru, the Welsh nationalists, to say that we cannot count on them. They must know that this is the historic opportunity to bring greater democracy to the governance of Wales. If they seek to sabotage or not to help that process, they will do a great disservice to the people of Wales. The giant step is to get an assembly. Thereafter, it will move as fast and as far as the people of Wales want.

I have set out my personal credo of why I have moved in respect of Welsh devolution. There is a Welsh dimension and it is of value. Obviously, as we saw last Thursday, there cannot be a serious debate before the general election, but I hope that afterwards there will be such a debate up to the referendums in September—a healthy national debate, building on the strength of our community and on our identity, which is diverse, real and of value, when globalisation and all the forces that internationalise us can lead to such a dreary sameness.

9.3 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): This has been a remarkable St. David's day debate on Welsh affairs for many reasons. First, it is the last St. David's day debate before an election, which on present form looks as though it may bring to an end, within eight or nine weeks, 18 years of continuous government by the Conservative party. Secondly, the debate coincides with a by-election in the Wirral, which again, according to form—we do not know what has happened today—may put the Government in a minority position for the first time in 18 years.

Thirdly, the debate has been remarkable because of the retirements that have been celebrated in the valedictory addresses, which we have heard from three corners of the House, if I can put it that way. The right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) said goodbye to such debates in his inimitable style as an old Harrovian, with the emphasis of course on the Harrovian. He said that some people might consider him to be servile, but that he saw himself as humble. He has made countless distinguished speeches. He may end up serving the Palace of Westminster in another capacity, but we know not yet.

I should also mention the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), a distinguished lawyer from the Liberal party who has been in the House for many more years than I have. In the past four years at least, we have not had to worry about splits in the Welsh Liberal party. He has given remarkable service during that period and previously.

Like many others, including the Secretary of State, the hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the bizarre procedure of the Dyfed Powys health authority, which announced the closure of eight community hospitals, without naming them. The Secretary of State administered what seemed to be a rebuke that may be acted upon—I do not know whether Mrs. Bourne, the chair of the health authority, will resign tomorrow.

That brings me to the third retiree, my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell), my mother's and brother's Member of Parliament who has been Chairman of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs for a long time. Whichever party is elected, the next Government will have to give serious thought to the best way of employing my hon. Friend's remarkable talent in the public service. One could say that a Welsh triple crown of retirees have made their valedictory addresses tonight. I hope that they do not become a Bermuda triangle of people lost to the public service when they cease to be in the House.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery referred to the importance of the national health service in Wales, not only because of the problems of the Dyfed Powys health authority, but, as we should always remember in a St. David's day debate, because of the remarkable contribution that Welsh politicians have made to founding the modern welfare state.

Being a Liberal, the hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned Lloyd George. As a Labour Member, I would add the two other distinguished names of Jim Griffiths and Aneurin Bevan. Between them, those three politicians erected the triple crown of the welfare state by introducing old-age pensions, universal national insurance and the national health service.

One might say that the Welsh contribution to modern British politics is the welfare state. It arises from Welsh history and the difficult and dangerous occupations in which Welsh people have traditionally been engaged—mining, quarrying, steel making, tinplate and so on—which made people concerned about what would happen if the roof fell in, for example. A miner might think, "I have money today, but what would happen tomorrow if I broke my back in a pit accident?" and others might worry about something happening in the dangerous and dirty occupations of most of our ancestors.

The speeches to which I have referred have given us a picture of Welsh debates over the past 10 years or more and that is enormously valuable to those of us who hope to be here after the next election on whichever side of the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gower, a distinguished son of the famous village of Tumble, also mentioned the 14-year wait for a cardiac surgery unit in Morriston hospital. It was a famous pre-election promise by Lord Crickhowell just before the 1983 election. The unit will open later this year, some 14 years later.

Mr. Donald Anderson: It did not help him in Swansea.

Mr. Morgan: Perhaps not. That is the great paradox of Welsh politics. Whatever Conservative Secretaries of State think they are donating to an area, they certainly do not get any reward from the people of Wales.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gower asked what we should do about the withdrawal of NHS dentistry from large areas of Wales. Should we solve the problem by utilising salaried dentists employed by the health authorities or by expanding community dental services that are provided by the NHS? We have never had a clear answer on that.

My hon. Friends the Members for Gower and for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) mentioned the Sea Empress disaster. We are just past the anniversary of that—it was about 13 months ago. I imagine that I am speaking for hon. Members on both sides when I say that we expect a proper statement—I know that the matter falls primarily to the Secretary of State for Transport—and some debating time, if possible, on the report of the marine accidents, investigation branch of the Department of Transport. The people of Wales will insist on that as part of their rights of parliamentary accountability, although I fully appreciate that the Secretary of State for Wales cannot make that promise on behalf of his colleague at the Department of Transport.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), who is certainly not retiring, made two points. The first was about transforming the Welsh education system to concentrate on elite education. I would prefer to give greater priority to the problems of vocational education and the shortage of engineers that we shall have, to ensure that the new firms that move into Wales do not take all the engineers from the existing factories, thereby creating a crisis out of the success in getting new firms to move in.

I believe that the Secretary of State referred to the headline in yesterday's *Western Mail* about south-east Wales being the easiest place to get a job. That newspaper article was based on a report from the Gwent training and enterprise council into that problem, because it was being lobbied by 200 business men from Gwent who were worried that there were not enough engineers to staff the middle management, the technical side, the quality control side and the design side of the new firms, such as Newport Wafer-Fab and LG, which are moving in.

Those new jobs create a problem at the level of skilled labour, technician labour and graduate engineer labour. That is a problem that the Welsh economy must address now—not the creation of an elite for sport or the old professions, but the creation of an expanded vocational engineering service and the removal of the low prestige that vocational subjects still have relative to academic subjects.

Another issue addressed in many speeches is the Welsh fiscal deficit. The Secretary of State has published two booklets on the subject, referring to Wales having 5 per cent. of the United Kingdom population, but producing only 4 per cent. of the tax revenue. That is not because the Welsh are better tax dodgers than the English, I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in case you are concerned on behalf of your constituents. It is simply a reflection of the fact that, although it has 5 per cent. of the population, Wales has only 4 per cent. of the UK gross domestic product.

That fact has emerged from many other studies. Only last month a study was published on regional trends or economic trends—I forget which—showing that gross domestic product in Wales, which is one of those boring statistics that nobody understands, has fallen again relative to the United Kingdom average. In 1995, it was down from 84 per cent. to 83 per cent. That means that the average family income of Mr. and Mrs. Jones and the kids in the back streets or the valleys of Wales has fallen and can now be said to be 20 per cent. below the UK average. Someone whose income is 20 per cent. below the UK average will clearly pay 20 per cent. less tax than the UK average.

Those figures can be used in various ways. My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli used them in the context of the Maastricht debate and the issue of the fiscal deficit. My point is—

Mr. Denzil Davies: For the record, my remarks were not made in the context of a Maastricht debate. I said that a country with a fiscal deficit of 15 per cent. could not exist as an independent country.

Mr. Morgan: I paraphrased my right hon. Friend wrongly. He is right. He specifically excluded Maastricht. He used the figures in his argument against the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones). How does the conclusion in the Secretary of State's booklet that Wales has only 4 per cent. of Great Britain's GDP and 5 per cent. of its population fit the picture painted in his speech? We must say, "Hang on a minute, Secretary of State. Where is this land of milk and honey with its vast numbers of jobs that you are claiming to be leading, indeed to have created?"

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morgan: No, I will not give way. If it is true that the Secretary of State has created all those jobs—I have certainly heard such claims from him and his four or five predecessors in the 10 years that I have been in the House—and high standards of health and education, how can the statistics in his own booklets on the Welsh fiscal deficit and Welsh GDP indicate that average family income in Wales is 20 per cent. below the UK average? To take the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli, as of this moment, according to the statistics—

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morgan: I have already told the hon. Gentleman that I will not give way.

[Mr. Morgan]

If Wales were an independent country or, to make it sound less controversial, were counted as an independent country, and therefore in the OECD GDP league table, it would be 21st out of the 26 countries. We would be ahead of Spain, Portugal, Greece and Turkey—and that is it. I think that that is an accurate picture of where we are at the moment. What a remarkable contrast that is to the picture painted by the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State mentioned that, over the past 10 years, manufacturing employment was up in Wales. "What a remarkable thing that was," he said. When the Government came to power in 1979, 300,000 people were employed in manufacturing—but only 200,000 people are now. In fact, there has been a net loss of a third of manufacturing jobs over the 18 years that the Government have been in office.

The Secretary of State's speech was very much like a colonial governor's report back to the colonial office of 50 years ago, saying that the crops are growing well, exports are up, the natives are happy, there are a few noises about constitutional change but those can soon be sorted out by sending another boat-load of trinkets. That was really all he was saying. He was not looking at the bottom line, the acid test: how prosperous is the country that he is claiming is doing so well? That is the con trick.

The Secretary of State used the words "con trick", especially with regard to the health service. When he talks about increasing expenditure on the NHS next year, why does he always use the weasel-word, con-trick phrase of "compared with the plans for the present year"? Why does he not compare the figures with actual expenditure? He says that, when comparing expenditure this year—he means actual expenditure, which is what the Health Minister says whenever he makes a speech—with actual expenditure next year, it will increase by more than the rate of inflation. Yet the plans that he has announced for next year do not represent an increase of more than the rate of inflation.

The Bank of England says that inflation this year will be 2.9 per cent., yet the Government's plans, which have been announced, represent only 2.4 per cent above this year's health expenditure. If the Secretary of State is talking about con tricks, I am afraid that he must look at the use that he makes of the health statistics by leaving out the fact that he must go back to planned expenditure not actual expenditure for the present year.

I should like to refer briefly to the constitutional issue, which has come up time and again. Its broad thrust is whether being interested in constitutional change makes Wales turn inwards as a country, which I think was what the Secretary of State was saying, although how he would know I do not exactly know, or whether it helps Wales to emerge on the international and European stage more than it has in recent years, as we would claim. As we see it, the European summit is a huge opportunity to put Wales and its capital on the map. We are all absolutely delighted—I believe that we are all delighted—that it will be held for the first time in Cardiff in June next year. In the following year—1999—the rugby world cup final will be held in Wales.

By their very nature, the European summit and the rugby world cup are temporary, although they will be huge boosts to Wales and to perceptions of Wales abroad. Once the caravan has passed, things will go back to normal. If Wales wants not merely to be put on the map but to stay on the map, the creation of a Welsh Assembly is absolutely essential. An assembly will be the final part of a triple crown of achievements for which we should aim in 1997–99. I also hope that the timing will work out so that the first meeting of the Welsh Assembly will be held on the same day as the world cup final. I say that not because we want to ensure that a Welsh team is playing in something on that day, but because it will give a permanent boost to Wales.

The Secretary of State will have moved on by that time. He will have become the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer in the current Home Secretary's shadow Cabinet. He may even be enjoying himself there. Indeed, we have been told that he now has a private aeroplane, because he has been sponsored by some wealthy aeroplane-owning plutocrat. He might use that aeroplane to leave Wales—like the last American to leave Saigon—before the Welsh people take over and push him out. The Welsh people might say to him, "You've been here for a couple of years, and we're grateful that you've filled the job while we were waiting for a Labour Government. But now you've done your job. Get in that plane and go, because we need a Labour Government to put Wales back on its feet and, through a Welsh Assembly, to put it permanently on the map."

9.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Jonathan Evans): In preparing for this debate, I thought that it might be helpful to cast my eye over some previous St. David's day debates. I entered the House at the previous general election, and, although I participated in St. David's day debates as a Back Bencher, this is the first time I have had the honour of replying to one. Looking through the speeches made in those debates, I was struck by those made last year, as they seem to show a consistent theme. It is interesting that the Labour party recently decided not to run with a series of advertisements based on the Mr. Men characters. If it had decided to do so, we would, of course, have seen on the Labour Benches Mr. Gloomy and Mr. Glum, who always appear at St. David's day debates.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), however, is the person who consistently does not appear. He was not in the Chamber for last year's St. David's day debate, and he is not here today.

Mr. Morgan: As the Secretary of State knew that the Labour party conference was in Llandudno, would not the right solution have been for him to lend his new private aeroplane to the shadow Secretary of State so that he could have gone to Llandudno after the debate?

Mr. Evans: I think that we have heard rather too much in this debate about rail and road services to Llandudno.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) and my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) seem to know rather more about those services than the hon. Member for Caerphilly. However, I can cast some light on the matter. Today's newspaper states that the hon. Member for Caerphilly is in favour of a St. David's day holiday. He obviously decided—this year and last—to put that

preference into practice by taking a St. David's day holiday himself. I see from the Opposition Benches that he has been joined by virtually half his parliamentary party in missing the debate.

It is interesting to examine some of the remarks made in last year's debate—not least those made by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan). He was very generous, and said:

"In the past 10 years, Wales has missed out on all the big new *investment providing 2,000 jobs or more.*"

He detailed those investments, and said that there were

"six big investments providing 2,000 and 3,000 jobs during the past eight or nine years".

He said that Wales had got none of them. He then went on to say:

"We would have liked to have one of those firms and we might then have felt satisfied that Wales remained at the forefront of the Government's regional economic development effort."—[*Official Report*, 29 February 1996; Vol. 272, c. 1042.]

Those were his words in last year's debate. Within weeks, however, we had an announcement of 6,000 jobs at Newport.

In last year's debate, the hon. Member for Cardiff, West made 10 references to a company called Chunghwa Picture Tubes. Those of us who have listened to him repeatedly in debates know that 10 references to a company are only a few for him. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I listened for the name of LG in the hon. Gentleman's speech, but I am afraid that it did not spill from his lips. The hon. Gentleman is gloomy on every occasion.

Mr. Morgan: When the Under-Secretary reads *Hansard* tomorrow, he will find that I referred, in the most complimentary terms, to the arrival of LG, but I also referred to the fears expressed by 200 businesses in Gwent that, unless the Government got off their backside and did something about the supply of engineers, problems could be caused. Does he recall that, and will he now withdraw his stupid remarks?

Mr. Evans: I remember the hon. Gentleman making that point. I was listening keenly for the name of LG, because I had these references to earlier debates. I did not hear it. If the *Hansard* writers have managed to record one utterance of LG, I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I did not hear 10 references to LG like the 10 that he made when he attacked the Secretary of State 12 months ago. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) cannot just stand up and wave his notes.

Mr. Evans: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Morgan: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Mr. Evans: No, I want to make some progress and to respond to some of the points made in the debate.

One of the other consistent themes of Welsh debates has been the contribution by my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy. On every occasion on which he has contributed, he has graced the proceedings. I am grateful for the remarks which have been made by hon. Members on both sides of the House praising his contribution. Their remarks were generous, and rightly so.

Everyone recalls the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy to the passing of the Welsh Language Act 1993 and his work to promote the Welsh language. The fact that Welsh is now taught in all our schools in the Principality is down to his efforts. We can also thank him for the establishment of the fourth television channel. People in Wales, whatever their political opinions, recognise that those changes are down to his efforts.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy should also take credit for the remarkable improvement in standards of education in Wales in the time he was Welsh Education Minister. I had a letter last week from someone in my constituency setting out the view that everything was wonderful in education in 1979, and then the Tories were elected and problems started. I have been involved in politics for longer than that, and I have a report produced and published in 1980 by the current director of the Institute of Welsh Affairs, who is not regarded as a supporter of the Conservative party. The report spoke of the widening gap in the performance of Welsh schoolchildren compared to English schoolchildren during the Labour Government. At the beginning of that Government's time in office, around a third of young people in Wales left school without any qualifications.

That point ties in with the refreshing and honest speech by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). He made an interesting contribution which I hope many people will read. He said that the problems went back more than 30 years and he was not seeking to make any party political point. The evidence is that there has been a remarkable improvement, although I recognise that there is more to be done. The gap has not totally closed yet, but it has narrowed remarkably in the past 18 years, largely because of the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy. I reiterate the point that, in the five years to 1979, the gap in performance widened, and that is a judgment on some of the claims about the likely performance of a Labour authority.

I did not follow entirely one of the arguments of the right hon. Member for Llanelli. I accept his points about the need to ensure that we do our utmost to develop as much talent as we can in the young people of Wales and to present them with as many opportunities as we can. He made a point about supporting the elite in the education system, and I seem to remember him saying that it was also important to try to get standards in some schools in Wales up to those of the best public schools in England—I think that those were his words. He will recall that our assisted places scheme provides places in schools in Wales that operate at that level. I found it difficult to reconcile his opposition to the assisted places scheme with some of his remarks.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) also made a valedictory speech, which gives me the opportunity to say to him that, although we have disagreed about a wide range of things, as constituency neighbours over the past five years we have also managed to find things on which, from time to time, we can agree, and advance the interests of the people of Wales. During the hon. and learned Gentleman's time in the House,

[Mr. Evans]

he has demonstrated his willingness to work in that way; I certainly know that he has done so during the years in which I have been here.

The hon. and learned Gentleman's contributions have always been interesting. I note what he said about Dyfed Powys health authority, but he does not require a further reply from me, because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already dealt specifically with his questions.

Both the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery and the hon. Member for Ogmore (Sir R. Powell) gave what was, in my view, too negative an opinion of the health service. I remind them that, for about 37 of the 50 years of the existence of our national health service, a Conservative Government have been in office, building up that health service.

The Opposition sometimes want to portray an image of the Government as one in some sense committed to undermining the health service, but this is a health service that we have grown during the years in which we have been in government. The good things about our health service are things that we have developed, and we need to assert that much more strongly in the weeks, months and years ahead.

The hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) also made a valedictory contribution, and I agree with everything that has been said about his chairmanship of the Welsh Affairs Select Committee. He told the House that he had received a good deal of training, both from his predecessors and from others in the House, not least Leo Abse. The hon. Gentleman will know of my own personal connection with Leo Abse. Certainly there is a great deal to be learnt from somebody of such wide experience. I owe a personal debt to the hon. Member for Gower, because I have learnt much from him.

I am also grateful for the hon. Gentleman's observation, which in a way underpinned the debate, that he regarded all the people who had served with him on the Welsh Affairs Committee as friends in the House. Just about everybody who has contributed to the debate falls into that category, and the feeling is mutual—although I also share the view expressed in a telling intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North–West. It may be received rather better by the Opposition than by some of my hon. Friend's other interventions.

My hon. Friend tellingly pointed out that the hon. Member for Gower was saying how effective his work on the Welsh Affairs Committee had been, which showed how accountable our system of government is, here in the House. It is a shame that more attention is not given to the work undertaken by the Committee that the hon. Gentleman chaired, because it gives the lie to claims that Parliament is unaccountable.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) talked about a Welsh Assembly, and also spoke in glowing terms about my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). In my intervention, I tried to set the historical record clear.

The strictures of the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) about political appointments being made to all the public bodies in Wales sat rather ill with the fact that he then proceeded to propose the hon. Member for Gower as the next chairman of the health authority. My knowledge of the old Labour party tells me that, irrespective of Lord Nolan, it seems to be a case of "back to the old days".

Mr. Donald Anderson *rose—*

Mr. Evans: I am seeking to draw my remarks to a close.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East also said that he was concerned about the demand-led element in further education funding, and asked me to write to him. I shall be happy to do so, although I can tell him that I am aware of the position, and I am examining the options. I shall write to him in fuller terms in due course.

The hon. Gentleman went on to allege that we were a Unionist party, as though that was something of which we should be ashamed. From the time I made my maiden speech in the House, I have made it clear that I have no shame about the fact that I am a Unionist. The time was when the Labour party was a Unionist party, but we have come to question that now.

Mr. Anderson: The point I was making was that, as the Conservative party has lost support in both Wales and Scotland, it has retreated into being an English nationalist party.

Mr. Evans: It cannot be claimed that pointing out the disadvantages inherent in Labour's proposals for the creation of a separate Welsh Assembly means that we are an English nationalist party. That does not necessarily follow at all. The line that we are putting to the people of Wales and to the rest of the country is the same line as we were putting in 1979. I am bound to say that I remember those debates, and the way in which we were characterised at that time as isolated from Welsh opinion.

I remember that those campaigning for a yes vote produced a leaflet saying that, in fact, the only people opposed to an assembly were members of the Conservative party and members of the Country Landowners Association. They also produced cartoons at that time which portrayed a similar message. I recognise that we were helped, in that we had one or two Labour Members who were prepared to join us during the debate. I am bound to say that, in his heart of hearts, the hon. Member for Swansea, East knows that that opinion still lurks in the Labour party.

Mr. Morgan: What about the former Prime Minister?

Mr. Evans: My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup has been consistent in his view on this matter for more than 30 years. I well remember another leaflet produced by those campaigning for a yes vote which contained a photograph of my right hon. Friend and urged the people of Wales to vote yes because Mr. Heath was recommending it. I am bound to say that that has not been put forward by the Labour party as an explanation for the eventual result. Against a background in which those proposing the establishment of an assembly claimed the support of all within the trade unions, those within the Churches and the intelligentsia in Wales, the result was that the people of Wales voted by a margin of four to one against.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen was typically honest in responding to my question to him. The public mood in Wales in the late 1970s was very much more in favour of the establishment of an assembly than it was towards the conclusion of the debate on the referendum itself. There are a number of reasons, one of which was that the public in Wales had the opportunity of watching the way in which the debate went in Parliament. They saw that Members of Parliament from all parts of the UK had individual proposals for changes to the propositions, and we were able to engage in a debate and decide whether amendments should be made to legislation. That has always been the procedure of the House.

Those debates substantially informed the referendum debate and the final decision of the people of Wales. The Labour party proposes to have what it calls a pre-legislative vote, in which the people of Wales will be invited to vote on a paper produced by the Labour party without there being an opportunity to amend it. Presumably, Labour will then railroad those Members of Parliament who are here into the view that they should support that proposal, come what may. That is an outrageous proposal, and Plaid Cymru must think so also. That is why it is arguing that there should be not pre-legislative choice, but a multi-option choice. In that regard, I do not share the view of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) about a multi-option choice.

The answer is to ensure that we have a proper debate in the House before any such proposal is made. In the circumstances, it is clear that the Labour party is not prepared to go down that road, because it is fairly sure that the outcome of a referendum would be the same the next time.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved,

That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 28 February 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Adoptive Mothers (Maternity Leave)

9.34 am

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): I wish to present a petition of the citizens of the United Kingdom asking that the House pass the Adoptive Mothers (Maternity Leave) Bill, which is on the Order Paper today and would end the unfair discrimination experienced by adoptive parents and give them the same maternity rights at work as birth mothers.

In the short space of just over one week since the Bill had its First Reading, the newly formed Adopters Campaign for Equality has secured 1,500 signatures for this petition. In view of the Prime Minister's statement that he wishes to remove barriers to adoption, the petitioners urge the House to take the practical step by passing the Bill, which would end the unjust discrimination against women who cannot bear children and who choose to adopt.

To lie upon the table.

BILL PRESENTED

BUILDING SOCIETIES

Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Secretary Gummer, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Mr. William Waldegrave, Mr. Secretary Dorrell, Mr. Michael Jack, Mrs. Angela Knight and Mr. Phillip Oppenheim presented a Bill to amend the Building Societies Act 1986; to make provision for amalgamating the Building Societies Investor Protection Board and the Deposit Protection Board into a single board and the Building Societies Investor Protection Fund and the Deposit Protection Fund into a single fund; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday 3 March, and to be printed [Bill 124].

PETITION

Lewisham Hospital (Elective Surgery)

Madam Speaker: We now come to the Orders of the Day and the Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill—

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): On a point of Order, Madam Speaker. I have indicated that I would present a petition this morning. It is on the list, I believe.

Madam Speaker: I was not aware of that, but there is no reason why we should not take it, as the hon. Lady is here.

Ms Ruddock: I am extremely grateful to you, Madam Speaker. I know that Conservative Members seek a distraction this morning.

I wish to present a petition brought on behalf of my constituents and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) and for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd). About 1,000 constituents have signed, because they are shocked and angry that all elective surgery has been cancelled at the local hospital in Lewisham. The petition reads:

The petition of the residents of Lewisham and South East London and past and present patients of Lewisham Hospital and their families declares that the Lewisham Hospital is a vital service to the people of Lewisham and South East London. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Health to reverse the instruction of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Authority to Lewisham Hospital to cancel all non-urgent admissions scheduled for surgery up to 31st March 1997, and urgently investigate why admissions to the Accident and Emergency Service are 12 per cent. higher than anticipated in the contract with LSLHA.

And the petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the table.

Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill

Order for Third Reading read.

9.36 am

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne) *rose—*

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I spy strangers.

Notice having been taken that strangers were present, MADAM SPEAKER, *pursuant to Standing Order No. 143 (Withdrawal of Strangers from House), put forthwith the Question,* That strangers do withdraw.

The House proceeded to a Division:—

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich) (*seated and covered*): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I inquire what is happening to our proceedings given that more than eight minutes has elapsed since the Division Bell rang?

Madam Speaker: Yes. It has been brought to my attention that the Division bells at Carriage Gates are not working, and the police are not aware that a Division is on. I have therefore allowed another two minutes for the Division, so that Members who wish to vote may do so.

The House having divided: Ayes Nil, Noes 20.

Division No. 86] **[9.37 am**

AYES

Tellers for the Aye:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. George Galloway.

NOES

Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Fabricant, Michael
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
Maitland, Lady Olga
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfld)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Waller, Gary
Waterson, Nigel

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Richard Ottaway.

Question accordingly negatived.

It appearing from the report of the Division that 40 Members were not present, MADAM SPEAKER *declared that the business under consideration stood over till the next Sitting.*

Mr. Waterson: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Can you confirm that, as a result of that procedural vote, the Bill is unlikely to make further progress this Session? Can you also help me to understand the mysterious absence of the Labour party in the No Lobby, despite the protestations of support for my Bill from the Opposition Front Bench?

Madam Speaker: On the hon. Gentleman's second point, it is not for me to know who goes into the Division Lobbies—that is not my business. As far as I know, the hon. Gentleman has every opportunity to make progress on his Bill on another occasion.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. It should also be apparent that, on the morning following the remarkable Wirral, South by-election victory, the Government, whose Bill it really is, were unable to muster more than 20 Members in the Lobby. That is indicative of a Government who are not only incapable of winning by-elections, but—

Madam Speaker: Order. That has nothing to do with a point of order.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I checked the annunciator screen yesterday, and this Bill was not mentioned. That misled me greatly, and I had to make inquiries to discover the business. What can be done to ensure that the annunciator screen gives hon. Members the correct information?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Lady is quite right. The Bill appeared among the Orders of the Day. Every day it has, quite properly, appeared among the remaining Orders of the Day.

Mrs. Wise: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Appearing among the remaining Orders of the Day is not sufficient to alert hon. Members to the fact that the Bill is to be the first business of the morning. Can steps be taken to ensure that the annunciator screen gives the proper information?

Madam Speaker: I think that hon. Members must be alert to the business of the House.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Does it not serve the Government right? I took a slightly different view, and did not sign the motion of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), but the proposal should have come, not from the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), but in a statement from the Home Secretary—

Madam Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for me. We must proceed with our business.

Prisons (Alcohol Testing) Bill

Not amended, (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Order for Third Reading read.

9.52 am

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North–East): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I did not expect that we would reach my Bill so early in the morning, but it just goes to show. The Bill was first presented to the House by my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Ward) on 20 November. I am pleased to say that at the time I was—and still am—one of its main supporters. It therefore gives me pleasure to move its Third Reading.

The Bill's Second Reading was most ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) on 13 December. *Hansard* shows that a full debate was held that morning on this important issue. The Bill's Committee stage on 29 January was somewhat shorter than that of most Bills—I understand that it took a little less than one minute.

The Bill's background is straightforward. It is fair to say that most hon. Members believed that the power to test prisoners for alcohol in prisons already existed, but it did not—hence the Bill. It bridges a gap that exists in the prison rules, bringing them into line with the rules on drug testing that were passed not long ago.

I am sure that we all appreciate how difficult it is to keep control in a prison, and particularly to enforce discipline. The problem must be made greater when drugs or alcohol are present. There is an even bigger problem in open prisons, where prisoners are more frequently placed on temporary release and it is easier for them either to drink off the premises or to get alcohol on to the premises.

There have been some important steps recently to strengthen prison rules. One such rule was passed in 1995, when it was determined that one of the conditions of any prisoner released on licence would be that he must not enter a public house. I am not sure how easy that provision is to enforce, but the condition exists. The power to test prisoners when they come back to prison, having been out on temporary release, will certainly provide a deterrent. The second important change occurred in September 1996, when it was made a proper disciplinary offence to consume alcohol in prisons.

In the Second Reading debate my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) rightly mentioned another significant impact of having alcohol in prisons. It encourages a prison mafia to use alcohol as a means of controlling other prisoners, a means of exploiting prisoners and, equally importantly, a means of raising money. Those are all reasons for the Bill to be given a Third Reading this morning.

It is difficult to estimate the exact scale of alcohol consumption in prisons. Stills have been discovered in a number of prisons, concealed in remarkable places. They have been discovered in the Wolds prison in East Yorkshire, and in Ashwell prison in Leicestershire.

Equally disturbing is the number of prisoners shown to have an alcohol problem. A survey carried out in 1994 by the National Association of Probation Officers showed that 58 per cent. of prisoners had an alcohol problem. That should give us all cause for thought, and make us determined to ensure that the Bill receives a Third Reading.

The Bill sends a powerful message to prisoners that drinking alcohol will not be tolerated in prison. That is a power that many hon. Members thought already existed. The Bill is straightforward, and I commend it to the House.

9.58 am

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): I rise in support of the Bill. It is surprising to many hon. Members and to those outside that its provisions are not already law. As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North–East (Mr. Congdon) said, there already exists similar legislation to control the abuse of drugs.

Last Friday, I visited a young offenders institution three miles south of Lichfield called Swinfen Hall young offenders institution, where I spoke to the governor, Mrs. Jacqui Francis, and met members of staff and inmates. I told Mrs. Francis that I wanted to take part in this debate, and she kindly gave me her views on the Bill. It is important that people should know the views of those on the ground who actually run our prisons. Mrs. Francis writes:

"Historically the major form of substance abuse in prisons has been the brewing and consumption of hooch. The visible consequences are aggression, bullying, assaults, fights, resistance to authority and, occasionally, alcohol poisoning. Whilst the resources invested in combating drug use have paid dividends, resources committed to eliminating alcohol abuse would pay more."

In many ways, therefore, she feels that the Bill is more important than previous drug-control Bills.

Mrs. Francis points out:

"Mandatory drug testing has reduced the incidence of recreational drug use. There is every reason to believe that, with appropriate sanctions, alcohol testing would have a similar impact.

There is some evidence, most notably in category C and D prisons, that prisoners who have been forced off drugs by MDT (Mandatory Drug Testing) have turned, or returned, to alcohol as a substitute."

She says, and I agree:

"This is an unfortunate substitute since it is more likely to lead to aggressive behaviour and control problems."

Surely that must be particularly true in young offenders institutions, where the inmates are between the ages of 16 and 21.

Mrs. Francis continues:

"The facility to test would be particularly useful after temporary release"—

this point is specifically addressed in the Bill—

"outside work or social visits where prisoners may have the opportunity to access alcohol. At present"—

this is extraordinary—

"whatever suspicion or indication of inebriation there may be, prison staff are impotent to take action, and prisoners know this."

She told me that sometimes people have returned to the prison obviously drunk, yet prison officers have been unable to do anything about it.

It is really is extraordinary that it has taken so long for the Bil to be introduced. Mrs. Francis ends her letter thus:

"Alcohol intake continues to play a very large part in the commision of criminal offences. The Prison Service is not effectively able to fulfil its purpose of confronting offending behaviour if it has no means of identifying and preventing continuing alcohol abuse."

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

I pay tribute to Mrs. Jacqui Francis and to her dedicated staff and motivated auxiliaries. Their work will be helped, and the safety of inmates will be ensured, by the passing of the Bill.

10.3 am

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I warmly welcome the Bill. For some time, I have taken a considerable interest in the management of prisons. Indeed, I introduced what became the Prisoners (Return to Custody) Act 1995 and when researching and preparing for that legislation, which dealt with the problem of prisoners failing to return to prison on time, I became aware of other discipline problems.

The significance of this Bill is that it is a natural development from tackling the problem of drugs, and I am pleased that we already have on the statute book means whereby prisons can institute mandatory drug testing. That will undoubtedly be part of a wider programme to tackle a modern curse, which destroys people's lives. What people do not realise is that alcohol can do the same.

The problem is not as acute in secure prisons as in open prisons. I have two prisons on the edge of my constituency—Downview for long-term prisoners and Highdown for remand prisoners—and in both there is a rigorous system of searching prisoners and their visitors, so it is difficult to bring in alcohol. In addition, prisoners are not going in and out of the prison.

There is, however, a real problem in open prisons, which, by their very nature, operate a different and more relaxed regime. The purpose is to enable prisoners who have perhaps already served most of a long sentence to prepare themselves for life outside. Many are given temporary releases, which can be for several different reasons. The prisoners may be going out for training or for a job interview; or they may be returning to their families to begin the rehabilitation process of re-entering the community. Sometimes they are away as long as four days.

When they go out, some prisoners go on an alcoholic binge. The difficulty is that, although on a four-day release they might have time to sober up on the final day before returning to prison, they very often do not do so. They can come back having cruised around local pubs and drunk an excess of alcohol, with the result not only that are they intoxicated, which is unpleasant in itself, but that they intimidate local communities.

We have to give special consideration to communities in the hinterland of an open prison, and it is right that we should give careful attention to the problem of prisoners and alcohol. When an intoxicated prisoner returns to gaol, he can become aggressive and difficult to handle; and he can create a breakdown in discipline or incite others to misbehave. The good management of a prison means that all inmates must live an orderly life—that is beneficial not only to the management of the prison as a whole, but to the prisoners' long-term rehabilitation programme.

Open prisons have been trying to tackle the problem of alcohol, but have been frustrated in their efforts. Ford open prison was experiencing such an acute problem that it introduced its own programme of alcohol testing. An off-the-shelf meter for measuring alcohol levels was bought, and staff used it, but then, to their amazement, they discovered that the testing was outside the law, and they had to stop. It was interesting that, during that time, the use of testing deterred inmates from returning drunk, trying to smuggle drink in, or trying to create their own secret stills.

Mr. Fabricant: Was the experience of the governor and officers of Ford open prison—with which I am familiar, having originally come from a part of Sussex that is not too far from Ford—similar to that of Swinfen, where the introduction of mandatory drug testing has caused prisoners to switch over to alcohol consumption, with the result that the problem of inebriation has become worse?

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for that useful information, of which I had not been aware. It is logical that that could be the result, so it is important that we should block off another avenue of abuse.

At Ford open prison, they had to stop alcohol testing, but it was a deterrent when in use—the alcohol problem went down. When staff from my office spoke to the governor of Ford open prison, he welcomed the Bill very keenly indeed.

If prisoners know, not only that they will be tested for alcohol abuse, but that punishment will follow, it acts as a deterrent. The sanctions open to a prison governor may be loss of privileges or even loss of remission. Those are powerful sanctions, which are an important and effective deterrent.

Not only do we want a deterrent factor—a discipline factor—but if an inmate has an alcohol problem, alcohol testing will reveal the problem and it can be treated. After all, we regard prisons not just as a means of removing unsociable people from the community but as a means of rehabilitating them, to return them to the community in a position in which they can make a contribution rather than create all the social ills that we have been so aware of.

I welcome the Bill, which I believe is very significant. I was amazed that it had not come into being already, but, as in all things in life, we learn through experience where the loopholes are. I have absolutely no doubt that this small Bill is significant and will play its a key role in discipline in prisons.

10.10 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As I shall speak in an Adjournment debate on sanctions against Libya and Iraq later, I was interested in the Bill—at first because I wanted to know how long the debate might last—and asked what the issues were. My curiosity was aroused, and I spoke to some prison officers, who said one thing above all others: "There may be abuses, but please don't think that that is the rule." In most prisons, there is a proper regime. There may be mistakes, and the Bill may be a very proper Bill to introduce, but it would be unfortunate if the impression were given that there was great abuse and misuse in all our prisons.

As one who, 25 years ago, introduced under the ten-minute rule Medical Inspection (Evidence of Drug-taking) (School Pupils) Bill in 1971, I know that there are many hazards in this complex subject, but I

would not oppose the Bill; I merely caution that the examples that have been cited do not represent the common situation in our prisons.

10.12 am

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): My constituents agree with the Home Secretary that prison should be an austere but decent place, and that the emphasis in prison should be on reform, education and the preparation of prisoners for their return into society as decent members of that society. However, prisons need to be a real deterrent, and that means that they must punish, so that career criminals will not want to return to prisons and repeat burglars and repeat rapists will not accept prison as a mid-career break—a price to be paid for the career they have decided to follow, a period for recovery and relaxation, a period for planning further villainy when they get out, while they take an Open university degree in the relative comfort of their prison cells.

Not to put too fine a point on it, my constituents want more barbed wire in and around prisons. They want glass screens between prison visitors and inmates, so that drugs are not passed. They want fewer television sets in prisons, fewer snooker rooms—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying rather wide. This is the Third Reading debate, and he should confine his remarks to the subject of the Bill.

Dr. Spink: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the point of the debate is that people want fewer drugs and less access to and use of alcohol in prisons, and that was the point that I was making.

Prisoners must be kept away from alcohol; that makes sense. It makes sense to close that loophole, which we were all surprised to know existed, by allowing prison staff to test for alcohol. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Ward) on choosing the Bill when he was so fortunate in the ballot for private Member's Bills, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) and for Croydon, North–East (Mr. Congdon) for doing the hard work on it.

A prison governor said that some inmates returned from home leave or temporary release worse the wear from drink, even though prison rules stated that, while they were on release, they must not enter licensed premises or betting shops or consume alcohol. We need to give prison staff like that governor the ability to do the necessary tests, so that they can control the actions of prisoners when they are away; I shall say more about that later.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), the Minister of State, Home Office, is one of the best prisons Ministers ever—indeed, one of the best Members ever. I am not a betting man, but if I were, I would bet that she had visited more prisons each month in her career than any prisons Minister, which shows how very much she cares. She is very keen for this measure to reach the statute book so that prisons can become safer places for their inmates. She cares not only about prison inmates but about the rest of society—the victims and potential victims of the villains who seem too often to languish in the relative comfort of our gaols, and should be prevented from doing so under the influence of alcohol.

Mr. Congdon: My hon. Friend said an important word just now when he talked about making prisons "safer". Does he agree with the point that I made and that my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) made on Second Reading—that a key aspect of making prisons safer for prisoners is to avoid drugs and alcohol being available to be used by some prisoners as a means of exercising control over, and extorting money from, other prisoners?

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, which I shall discuss in detail later.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone very much wants the power to test for alcohol in prisons, and I say, let the House give her the tools so she can do the job.

Mr. Fabricant: Very Churchillian. *[Interruption.]*

Dr. Spink: I am attempting to thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks.

David Roddan, general secretary of the Prison Governors Association, said that most inmates would welcome the breath tests, because drunken prisoners become troublemakers. He said:

"We support this initiative because prisoners who consume alcohol or get drunk in the local community damage the relationship of trust between the prison and the community. It is also not in the interest of the rehabilitation of prisoners"

to allow them to consume alcohol.

The measure will improve the ability of prison staff to control the culture of prisons, which is often negative. It will therefore help prisoners. As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East said, it will inhibit the prison mafias from growing, because alcohol is one of the key currencies used in prisons; thus the Bill will make prisons a safer place for inmates. Last year, on a visit to Chelmsford prison, I saw for myself that alcohol is a key factor in the negative prison culture.

Mandatory drug testing has proved very successful, and has significantly reduced the use of drugs in prison. In 1995, in some prisons, a drugs testing trial was conducted, in which two thirds of prisoners tested positive for drugs. That is a remarkable and disgraceful fact. In 1996, 34,496 prisoners were tested up to July, and only 30 per cent. tested positive, which shows that mandatory testing is working. We must go further, and cut off the supply, not merely of drugs but of alcohol, so the Bill is a most important measure. Importantly, of the 34,496 prisoners tested up to July, not one tried to refuse the test: the House should dwell on that important fact.

The Bill is an excellent measure and I wish it fair wind—it should have been on the statute book many years ago. I trust that the House will vote in favour of it today.

10.20 am

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I am not clear about the extent to which alcohol is a problem in prisons. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) suggested that practice might vary a lot from one prison to another. I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for the Home Department could comment on that.

My impression of the Prison Service is that performance is pretty patchy, certainly when it comes to the quality of management. We have taken great steps forward in the past few years. I was a keen supporter of establishing the service as an executive agency, with its

[Mr. Tim Smith]

own director general, because I thought that that would help it to focus on the need for good quality management. We sometimes underestimate the problems that managers and prison officers face in trying to control a difficult regime, so I can well understand why the hon. Members who have supported the Bill feel that it is right to give the prison authorities this power. Clearly, discipline is vitally important in a prison, and the power will add to the range of powers that prison governors already have to ensure that there is a sensible disciplinary regime.

As I understand it, the alcohol problem can arise when prisoners are out for a short time and drink too much—or drink at all—in open prisons, where it is easier to introduce alcohol and, in some cases, in closed prisons where there are stills for the illicit production of alcohol. The power should be introduced, but before we give the Bill a Third Reading it would be helpful if my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State gave us an indication of the extent of the problem. I suspect that it varies a lot from one prison to another. The quality of management is improving and it is important that we give prison governors more independence than they have perhaps had. That is what the Director General of the Prison Service, Richard Tilt, is attempting to do.

Secondly, the Bill states that there will be no cost to the public funds. Although I suppose that that must be right, or at any rate that the costs will be minimal, I understand that the meter required for testing can cost £600 or £700, and I do not know how many the service will require. It seems, therefore, that there may be some costs and I wonder whether my hon. Friend can comment on that and on the extent of the problem.

Having said that, it is important for us to support both management and prison officers. Sometimes, we underestimate the difficult task that they have to do—it is a demanding job. We should give them every support, and the Bill certainly does that.

10.23 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a short contribution to the debate, as this is an important issue. In the past five years, I have found—on the doorstep and in general—that the public are more concerned about law and order than any other issue. During my time as a Member of Parliament, I have held three public meetings on the issue and each was well attended. Members of the public certainly have left me in no doubt that they want more and stronger Government measures to deal with law and order problems, and that is what they have had in the past five years.

As for Bill, we are talking about people who have committed crimes and are serving sentences in Her Majesty's prisons. The thought that people who have been convicted of a crime, no matter how serious, are able to take alcohol while in prison or on temporary licence, would greatly alarm a number of my constituents.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Ward), who promoted the Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), who introduced it and my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North–East (Mr. Congdon), who moved the Third Reading. We must get the Bill enacted as quickly as possible, so that we give the authorities that are looking after our prisoners the tools they need to ensure that alcohol does not become a problem while people are in prison. Surveys show that alcohol can be a problem for people before they go into prison. Indeed, for a number, it may well be the cause of their going into prison in the first place. One survey in 1994 revealed that 58 per cent. of prisoners have a severe drink problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) told us what prisons are supposed to be about and his words would strike a chord with many people. As well as education, the role of prisons is to help those who are in prison. We need to see what we can do to assist those who have a severe drink or drug problem while they are in prison.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend agree that we must also help the prisoners who suffer not from inebriation but from the aggression of other prisoners who are drunk? Does he not think it a strange irony that some prison governors have said that the prisoners who used to suffer the effects of drug-taking—who were, at the very least, quiet—have been driven to consume alcohol as a result of mandatory drug testing, which has caused aggression towards innocent prisoners, if any prisoner can be innocent? That is causing a real problem in prisons.

Mr. Evans: Yes, I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, who said that every prisoner is a volunteer—the fact that prisoners have committed crimes means that they volunteered to enter prison—but prisons can become pressure cookers. There is pressure between the criminals, some of whom can be violent—I am delighted that they are not walking the streets—and can have drug and other problems. Drink will not help them in prison. We have a duty to ensure that prisoners are not the target of other prisoners who are acting under the influence of alcohol.

One other thing disturbs me. Prisoners are one side of the story, but the people who work on our behalf to ensure that the prison population, which is approaching 60,000, is not walking the streets, also need our protection. Prison officers are making our daily lives that much safer and the last thing that we want is for them to be the targets of prisoners who are suffering from taking alcohol. We must make certain that we give prison officers the rightful protection that they deserve.

I find it difficult to believe that one could have hooch and that alcohol could be distilled and circulated in prison—perhaps it happens in prisons with lax regimes. It is difficult to believe that we do not have sufficient security within our prisons to ensure that that does not happen and that, if it does, it is stamped out immediately. I would hope that any prisoners caught distilling their own alcohol would feel the firm hand of the law and be given a further sentence on top of their original sentence.

Another problem is that of prisoners who come out of prison on temporary licence or for some other reason—perhaps because they are approaching the end of their term and we want to rehabilitate them. The temptation for some of those offenders, who may have been locked away for three or four years, particularly when they meet old colleagues and friends, is to make for the nearest pub. They might be out of prison for only a short period and go on a drinking binge. We must ensure that, when they return to prison, prison officers have the power to test

them for alcohol, particularly when it is apparent that they have been drinking. Indeed, prison officers should be given the same power as they now have, thanks to the Government, to test for drugs.

Like many other hon. Members on both sides of the House, I have spent some of my time over the past five years visiting some of our prisons. I went to Strangeways in Manchester after the riots. Another point on which one might care to reflect is that some of the prison riots in the past few years may have been drink-related. We should take into account the fact that that is how they may have started in the first place.

I have also been to Preston prison just outside my constituency and to a young offenders prison, Lancaster Farms, in Lancaster to look at that regime. Two of the three prisons that I have visited have had large sums spent on them to ensure not that they are the most austere prisons but that they are places where offenders are sent for a period, and where, as well as being punished, they receive the direction, education and discipline that they failed to receive when they were in society.

I met a number of people who work within those prisons and I want to ensure that, particularly in young offenders institutions, they are given the tools to let offenders know that, if they take alcohol, they will be tested and will face punishment if they are found guilty of taking it.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend agree that the positive environment of education, training, development and changing prisoners' attitudes cannot take place successfully within a prison if prisoners have access to alcohol? Removing prisoners' ability to have access to alcohol by introducing a testing power will help the reforming ability of prisons and thereby help society as well as individual prisoners.

Mr. Evans: I agree with my hon. Friend. Some prisoners might never have gone a day without drinking alcohol when they were out in society, and their severe alcoholic problem might have led to a life of crime. We must ensure that, while such offenders are in prison, they are immersed in a regime whereby they do not have access to one of the elements that led to the problem in the first place. We must help to clean up some of our prisons. We have done so on the drugs front; if we can do it on the alcohol front as well, that will be extremely important.

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend tempts me to intervene again by mentioning drugs. He will be aware, as we all are, that a high proportion of the first use of drugs takes place under the influence of alcohol. If we cut off the supply of alcohol through the power to test for it in prisons, we can stop prisoners coming under the influence of alcohol, making misjudgments and becoming involved in drugs. In that way, we can help both prisoners and society at large.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The problem of creating a mafia within prisons was mentioned earlier. Some individuals within prisons are not the sort of people with whom one would wish to mix ordinarily, so for some prisoners to have to mix with such people, particularly if they have the power of alcohol and drugs, adds to the problem within prisons. I return to the point that I made earlier: why should our prisoner officers have to put up with that pressure when they already have all sorts of other pressures to put up with?

I do not want my speech to be regarded simply as negative or Victorian, in the sense that prisoners are to be punished at every turn while they are in prison. I do not accept that view for a second, although others may think that I do. We should ensure that we assist prisoners as much as possible. I understand that Alcoholics Anonymous, for instance, provides support to prisoners to help them overcome their problem.

Prisoners with an alcohol problem who, even while in prison, are prepared to go that extra mile to get their hands on alcohol, need more help than anybody else. It is not just a case of punishment and ensuring that they do not have access to alcohol from relatives or friends who visit them and somehow pass alcohol to them. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) that, if it is apparent that a prisoner is using his visitors as a means of getting alcohol and drugs and then circulating them to a wider group of people within the prison, we must take harsh action against him. It may mean that, for a period—perhaps even for the remainder of his sentence—he is separated from his visitors by glass or some other means so that objects cannot be passed to him from his relatives or friends. We should look seriously at that idea.

Lady Olga Maitland: My hon. Friend touches on an important point and I wonder whether he will explain it a little further. It is about alcohol being passed to inmates from visitors. Did my hon. Friend have the chance when he visited prisons to observe the procedure whereby bags are passed through an X-ray machine? On the whole, it is not customary for prison officers personally to search visitors, and that is a difficulty. They have the power to do so but tend not to use it. Should we not consider encouraging prison officers to make greater use of the power to search visitors when they fear that there is a problem of that nature?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend hits the point with the words "when they fear that there is a problem of that nature". I am sure that guilty visitors are known to the prison authorities. May I stress, however, that every visitor who enters the prison to visit an inmate should not be made to feel like a criminal. We must make absolutely certain that everyone is not tarred by the same brush. We must also be careful not to deter people from visiting friends and relatives in prison.

After all, part of our prison regime is rehabilitation, and the last thing we want to do is to leave prisoners in solitary isolation so that the only people they mix with are other prisoners and prison officers. We want to ensure that they have as many visitors as possible so we must be careful in choosing whose bags to search or who to put through an intimate search.

I take my hon. Friend's point seriously. When prison officers know that certain individuals may be guilty of passing alcohol or drugs to prisoners, a greater use of closed circuit television cameras within meeting rooms should be encouraged. I understand from my hon. Friend the Minister that some videotapes from those cameras have proved to be extremely interesting. Perhaps we should learn more of what goes on in meeting rooms between prisoners and their visitors.

[Mr. Evans]

When the Bill becomes an Act, I hope that prisoners who have problems will be given help, guidance and the opportunity to serve the rest of their sentence in prison without the temptation to turn to alcohol whenever problems arise, or just when they feel like drinking.

It is clear that the Bill has resource implications for prisons throughout the country. It has been estimated that the testing equipment would cost around £700. I support the prison building and reform programme that has been going on for the past 18 years, and I do not flinch when people say that we have more people in prison per head of the population than any other country in Europe. So be it. If people do the crime, they deserve to do the time.

We must ensure that that carries on, but we must also ensure that prisons get the resources that they need to implement the fresh obligations that we have placed on them, as in the case of drugs. Prisons must have the money to buy the best equipment and to arrange training for prison officers, so that they know what they are doing.

I was delighted to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point say that when prison officers have told prisoners that they would be tested, the prisoners have not refused. Presumably, they complied because they want to live in an atmosphere that is not repressive or oppressive, as might be the case if the regime was lax and fellow prisoners could get access to alcohol. That is where the trouble would begin. Far better for prisoners to allow themselves to be tested. If they have nothing to hide—if they have taken no alcohol—they will have no problems. To protect themselves, they would surely want their fellow prisoners, who may have had access to alcohol and could cause them problems in the future, to be tested.

Lady Olga Maitland: On the question how best to help prisoners, does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a good idea to follow the experiences that I have seen at Downview prison, where the Addictive Diseases Trust helps prisoners to overcome their drug addiction? That is largely a self-help programme, although led by professionals.

Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be useful to encourage prison governors to set up similar programmes to counteract alcohol abuse? So successful has the programme been at Downview prison that prisoners are seeking transfer to Downview from other prisons so that they can take part in the programme. Would it not be of enormous benefit to the prison population if such a programme were available for alcohol addiction?

Mr. Evans: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. We must examine various methods, including the one that she described. We must ensure that prisons have the resources to implement testing. We must also ensure that sufficient research is carried out. Several organisations must have good research to show how people suffering from alcohol dependency could be helped. Such programmes could be introduced into certain prisons—perhaps even test piloted—to see how effective they would be in helping prisoners before their release back into society.

Ultimately, that must be the goal for the vast majority of people locked away in prison. We all know of certain individuals whom I would wish to remain in prison for the rest of their natural lives, but the vast majority of prisoners will eventually be released back into the community. If they have had an alcohol problem in the past, surely we should ensure that we give them as much assistance as possible.

Although that might cost a little extra, in the long term it will save money. If prisoners come out of prison without having received any help or treatment, they will fall back into their old ways. Before long, they will be back on a career of crime and back in prison. We all know how expensive it is to keep prisoners in prison. It would be more intelligent for us to prioritise resources to help people while they are in prison if they have an alcohol problem, even if that is expensive in the short term. We must give them the support they need so that they do not reoffend or return to a life of alcohol abuse once they leave prison.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend agree that the precedent has been established? We already have the policy of spend to save. That was announced in the Budget. Would not such programmes be a good example of spending to save?

Mr. Evans: Of course. We know that Governments around the western world have problems prioritising resources. If we believe what we have been hearing from the Opposition, even they have a new sense of realism about spending pledges in the future, although of course no one believes that.

We should try to reprioritise money in the current budgets of the Prison Service. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point spoke of pool tables, colour television and goodness knows what. Resources that are going into leisure activities should in the long term go into more constructive and positive elements, such as a regime that gave treatment to prisoners who had a problem with alcohol.

I hope that we will use as much research as possible and the expertise that is available, not only in Alcoholics Anonymous but in the universities and abroad, to find out about new research.

I am an executive member of the all-party beer group—I should have said that at the beginning of my speech. We spoke earlier about temporary releases, the pubs dotted around our prisons, and the temptation for prisoners to go into those pubs, possibly on their way back to the prison. We have a duty to assist the landlords, landladies and people who work in pubs. If prisoners think that if they nip into the Dog and Duck—

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Or the Ball and Chain.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) speaks of his local.

If prisoners nip into the pub, whatever it may be called, for four or five pints before they go back into prison, we have an obligation to the 900,000 people who work in the drinks industry, including the wholesale, distribution and retail aspects. We have a duty towards them, some of whom are young ladies. If they are doing the afternoon shift, they may be the only people in the bar. A prisoner about to go back into prison for another few months, faced with the temptation of going into the pub for a few pints, will not be helpful to people working in pubs.

If prisoners know that they are going to be tested when they go into prison, they may be deterred from going into the pub. That will offer protection. There is too much violence associated with alcohol. The last thing we want is fights breaking out or crime taking place in pubs in the vicinity of prisons. Pubs are social places where people go to enjoy themselves. They do not want any threat of violence to themselves when they are sitting in a pub.

I am delighted to have participated in this debate. My constituents in the Ribble Valley, who may be somewhat surprised that the measure is not already law, will cheer when the Bill is passed. We are giving prison officers the protection they deserve and the tools they need to protect prisoners and society at large. We are also offering some assistance to those prisoners who suffer from alcohol dependency, so that they will be better people when they are released back into society.

10.49 am

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): As we made clear on Second Reading, the Opposition support the Bill. It was introduced originally by the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Ward), whom I have known for 10 years. Although I do not agree with all his views, he presents them in a measured way.

That tradition was continued by the hon. Member for Croydon, Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), who moved Second Reading. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) was correct to say that the people of this country put law and order at the top of the political agenda. We all know that crime in this country has doubled in the past 18 years under the Conservatives, and public concern was expressed by 23,000 electors in Wirral yesterday.

The contribution by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley began well. I realise that he was on an errand this morning, and, unfortunately, his remarks tended to wander a little. While I was convinced by the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Colchester, North, I stumbled over some of those that emerged from the wanderings of the hon. Member for Ribble Valley. As the Opposition have accepted the Bill in principle, I have little to say about it. However, the contributions of Conservative Members have tempted me to make several comments.

The tradition of measured argument, as embodied in the speeches of the hon. Members for Colchester, North and for Poole, was not repeated in the contributions of the hon. Members for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) and for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who took a rather censorious view of some of the goings-on in our prisons. I wondered whether the concern of prison authorities and the welfare and punishment of prisoners was their primary concern—I suspect that they have a hidden agenda.

I was a little amused by a remark from the hon. Member for Castle Point. He repeated the comments of a prison governor who had reported that some prisoners returned from temporary release somewhat the worse for drink. I could not help but think that perhaps the Serjeant at Arms could also complain of a similar phenomenon on occasion. The hon. Gentleman went on to say that drunken prisoners become troublesome. Again, the Serjeant at Arms could draw a parallel with the behaviour of some right hon. and hon. Members in the House. There is a danger that we may be a little too condemnatory, and fail to recognise the real problems that exist in our prisons.

Dr. Spink: I quoted Prison Governor David Bamber, who said that prisoners were returning from temporary release the worse for drink. His remarks were reported widely. I admit to having another agenda besides caring for prisoners: caring for society at large, and for innocent people.

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has acknowledged that, at the end of the day, we are concerned about what occurs in society and how to improve it. An authoritarian regime in prison may be necessary for a certain period. However, I have talked to prison authorities—although it is not my primary area of responsibility—who acknowledge that prisons cannot be run in that way.

Sometimes the prison regime must be tough and authoritarian, but at other times it must be relaxed a little in order to reward improvements in discipline, contributions to rehabilitation programmes and so on. We cannot have a rigid regime in prison all the time. We must recognise that, when people are incarcerated hour after hour, day after day, month after month and year after year—and rightly so—all sorts of pressures build up.

I fully support the Bill, but it is completely naive to believe that it will halt all mafia operations in prison. That is not the real world that prison authorities recognise. I visited Rochester prison three or four weeks ago. Prison authorities at that prison deal differently with four categories of prisoners within one management structure. That is necessary, as some prisoners may co-operate more fully when there is a relaxed regime. In other circumstances, the prison authorities recognise that prisoners would abuse such a regime, and that it is necessary to be tough. We must take a measured view of these issues.

I feel strongly that it is far too easy for hon. Members to jump up and make outrageous statements about social issues, based on ideology that is appropriate to 17-year-old Trotskyites or fascists, rather than examining the real problems in prisons and how best to deal with them. A principal reason for the Bill is that currently there are no statistics on the level of alcohol abuse in prisons. As with drug testing, the regime will require some co-operation from prisoners if we are to identify the level of alcohol abuse in prisons—without such co-operation, it will be extremely difficult to test effectively.

We must also remember that alcohol abuse occurs in many other areas of society—it does not happen only in prisons. The problems that such abuse causes in prisons are similar to those that it causes in other walks of life—whether it be indiscipline, failure to deal with details or to work effectively, or breakdown in social relationships. Those problems are caused by alcohol abuse, and they are made worse when people are incarcerated for long periods.

This is an important measure, which can provide prison authorities with an extra tool. It is also a way of calculating the extent of alcohol abuse in our prisons, so that prevention measures may be implemented. We must introduce rehabilitation exercises if they are needed to improve the climate within our prisons. Rehabilitation

[Mr. Henderson]

programmes to assist prisoners upon their release are also important. The measure has considerable merit, and I hope that hon. Members will support it.

10.58 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): At first glance, this appears to be a fairly straightforward measure. However, some answers are required from me—even on Third Reading.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have asked valid questions and identified several caveats. I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Poole (Mr. Ward), for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) and for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) on the extremely effective way in which they have piloted the measure through the House. I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on their useful comments and on the issues that they have raised, which we need to consider before the Bill leaves the House.

Before taking up the general points that have been made on Third Reading, I shall refer to the matters that have been raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and, to some extent, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), who are interested in and concerned about the information and evidence available to us about the nature and size of the problem of alcohol consumption.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow specifically began by saying that he thought that, by agreeing to this measure, we might give the impression that this is a much greater problem than in fact it is. I may have misconstrued or misinterpreted the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Mr. Dalyell: How widespread is it?

Mr. Kirkhope: I shall refer to the practical evidence that prison governors have collected. It is important, of course, that we consider the report produced by the health advisory committee for the Prison Service, which appeared in October 1996. The report confirmed a number of matters, which in turn show that there is a problem and that the Bill would be helpful in dealing with it.

To put things in perspective, it is estimated generally that about 7.6 million people over the age of 16 in England and Wales drink more than the limit advocated by the Department of Health in 1979—21 units a week for men and 14 for women. It appears that 6 per cent. of men and 1 per cent. of women have consumption levels of more than 50 and 35 units respectively. Those are levels considered damaging to health.

A survey of the physical health of prisoners, which was carried out by Bridgwood and Malbon in 1995, revealed that 93 per cent. of the male prisoners surveyed had consumed alcohol in the 12 months before imprisonment. That figure is similar to that found in the general population. However, prisoners were four times as likely as men aged 16 and over in the general population to describe themselves as either drinking quite a lot or drinking heavily. Two studies of mental disorder in the prison population have produced diagnostic data on the harmful or dependent use of alcohol. In 1989, Maden, Taylor Brook and Gunn found that, in a sample of 1,365 sentenced adult males, 118 had a primary diagnosis of alcohol dependence or abuse.

I shall not detain the House too long, but there is a great amount of information of the sort to which I have referred. I merely wish to take up the points raised by the hon. Members for Linlithgow and for Newcastle upon Tyne, North before—

Mr. Fabricant: I am wondering whether my hon. Friend or the Home Office generally has any view on those statistics in terms of causality. Do they believe that it is alcohol that causes crime, or that maybe criminals just happen to drink a great deal?

Mr. Kirkhope: I do not want to stray into territory that is obviously not of concern to us on Third Reading of an important Bill.

Dr. Spink: If we are to test prisoners to ascertain whether they have consumed alcohol and we find that some prisoners have an alcohol problem, is it not important that we deal with that problem and assist those prisoners to overcome it? Will my hon. Friend confirm that a letter written by Derek Lewis on 16 March 1995 stated:

"All prisons within England and Wales provide prisoners with access to education, treatment and counselling services for substance misuse via the prison health care centre, the probation service or outside agencies and visiting self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous."?—[*Official Report*, 16 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. 675.]

Is that not a good thing, and does it not show how seriously the Government view creating reforming regimes within prisons?

Mr. Kirkhope: I am sure that that is correct. I can confirm that. My hon. Friend is right.

We are concerned with the prison population. It is sometimes put around, however, that perhaps there is not as much concern shown as there might be. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North seemed to be trying to suggest that the Government had a certain approach. We feel that it is important to ensure that the prison population is, where possible, reformed, that the circumstances in which the prison population lives while in prison are ordered and that the activities that we are discussing are limited, because of their adverse effect on the chances of reforming prisoners.

I wished to make it clear to the hon. Members for Linlithgow and for Newcastle upon Tyne, North, as well as to others, that there is much statistical information, apart from the information to which I hope turn in a moment, which is very much anecdotal. There is also hard evidence of a need for action.

Lady Olga Maitland: What representations has my hon. Friend received from prison governors on the sanctions that they would like to apply in the event of an alcohol test showing positive results? There are, of course, a range of available options. Is such a result to be regarded as deeply serious and one that could lead to loss of remission, or would there be some form of loss of

privileges? Which privileges does my hon. Friend think are likely to be considered to be withdrawn and at what level would sanctions be applied—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is straying rather wide of the Bill in talking about possible consequences following testing. I have been tolerant this morning, given that some hon. Members have strayed from time to time. I have heard reference to the House of Commons beer group, for example. In fact, we are talking about alcohol testing in prisons. It may be that in future a Bill will come before the House that will enable hon. Members to consider the problems of the beer group. This morning, however, we are talking about alcohol testing in prisons.

Mr. Kirkhope: I do not want to stray into pastures that perhaps are not related to the Bill, including possible offences and remission for Members of this honourable House. I think, however, that my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam has a point when she asks what is likely to happen as a result of testing. It is a valid point—it has been taken up by other hon. Members—and I shall take it up later when dealing with procedural matters. I shall try, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not to stray too far.

The Bill would enable a prison officer or a prisoner custody officer in a contracted-out prison to take a sample of breath, urine or any non-intimate sample from a prisoner in any prison establishment for the purposes of ascertaining whether he or she has any alcohol in the body. The Bill is a logical extension of the powers already in force for drug testing—hon. Members have referred to drugs and their relationship with other matters, and I shall try to respond briefly to those comments—enacted by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

The power to test for drugs has been extremely valuable. It has helped the service to identify the size of the problem of drug taking in prisons. It has gone some way to help in reducing the misuse of drugs in prisons, as part of the overall strategy to reduce such. It is to be hoped that the Bill will in its turn go some way towards reducing the misuse of alcohol in our prisons.

Mr. Fabricant: May I ask my hon. Friend a slightly less philosophical question than my earlier one? Does he agree with the governor of Swinfen Hall young offenders institution, who said that, since the introduction of mandatory drug testing, which he welcomes, there has been a switch to prisoners drinking alcohol?

Mr. Kirkhope: I accept that that may be the case. Young offenders institutions are relevant to these discussions. The consumption of alcohol by young people is a matter of the greatest concern, in relation not only to these proceedings but to other proceedings before us, and to hon. Members.

Alcohol testing will support amendments to the prison rules. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire has hinted, young offender institution rules that were made in September last year included two new disciplinary offences for the consumption of alcohol. Previously, prisoners could be punished only if they were found in possession of alcohol, or if they offended against good order and discipline after drinking it. It is probably a matter of some surprise to the public that we have been comparatively limited in what we could do in the past to deal with this problem.

It is now an offence for a prisoner to be intoxicated wholly or partly as a consequence of knowingly consuming any alcoholic beverage. That is the more serious of the two new disciplinary charges. It applies to the prisoner who, it appears, is seriously intoxicated, in contrast to a prisoner who may have consumed only a small quantity of alcohol. To be satisfied of guilt, an adjudicator will have to be satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the accused was intoxicated.

Presently, if the adjudicator is satisfied after hearing evidence that the accused's behaviour was elated beyond the point of self-control—I am sure that many of us could put it in slightly different jargon, but that is the way it is described—the accused will satisfy the test of intoxication. It is not sufficient evidence for a guilty verdict to show that the behaviour was caused by skylarking or an excess of high spirits.

It is also an offence for a prisoner knowingly to consume alcoholic beverages other than any prescribed to him pursuant to a written order of the medical officer. I am sure that some hon. Members will find that interesting when they visit their medical practitioner. That charge is directed at the prisoner who, although not intoxicated, has knowingly consumed alcohol that has not been prescribed to him or her. The evidence should be such that it would lead a reasonable and right-thinking person to conclude that the accused had consumed alcohol.

Without a more objective means of analysis, which would be provided by formal testing, the available evidence is often insufficient to take any disciplinary action. That leaves governors of our institutions in considerable difficulty. Hon. Members must agree that the most important consideration is the position of the governor of the institution. He is responsible—

Mr. Fabricant: Or she.

Mr. Kirkhope: Or she, indeed. Governors are responsible for discipline within the institution. If they are unable to deal with a problem properly and to maintain discipline, their status may be questioned.

Mr. Tim Smith: Objective testing will be a great step forward. Will the Prison Service as a whole issue guidance to prison governors on appropriate levels—we know, for instance, what the level is for drink driving—or will that be a matter for prison governors? Will governors decide above what level it will be deemed to be a breach of the rules in their prison, so that everyone knows the position?

Mr. Kirkhope: That is an important point. There is concern about the procedures in the Bill. The Government support the measure, but we want to ensure that it works in practice. I shall deal with my hon. Friend's point shortly.

The Bill is logical and straightforward. Its three clauses encompass matters of concern. Clause 1 amends the Prison Act 1952 by inserting new section 16B. That section gives prison officers the power, subject to the governor's authorisation and to prison rules, to require any prisoner

"to provide a sample of breath for the purpose of ascertaining whether he has alcohol in his body."

[Mr. Kirkhope]

The authorisation may require a prisoner to provide a sample of urine

"instead of or in addition to a sample of breath"

and a non-intimate sample of any other description, not being a sample of breath or urine.

The Bill must provide flexibility, because it may ultimately be more cost-effective to use another system when technology is sufficiently developed in this area. An alternative system may have to be used because of the physical incapacity of a prisoner, or if the prisoner challenges the result of the breath test. To some extent, that mirrors the arrangements for people who drive while under the influence of drink and have to be tested by police officers.

The power is extended to young offender institutions, remand centres and secure training centres. It is also extended to prisoner custody officers in contracted-out prisons. The circumstances in which the power may be exercised will be set out in the prison rules. Clause 2 merely makes it clear that the requisite authorisation is given by the director in the case of contracted-out prisons.

Clause 3 makes provision for the short title, commencement and extent of the Bill. The Bill applies to England and Wales only. However, the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, which is currently before the House, will make similar provision for Scotland. It is important for Scotland to have the same facilities available.

Mr. Dalyell: Are there any substantial differences? I think not, but will the Minister confirm that?

Mr. Kirkhope: I understand that there are not, but I shall check that point with officials, and if there is a difference I shall mention it later in my speech or write to the hon. Gentleman.

The Bill will assist the Prison Service to manage prisoners who drink alcohol in prison or when released on temporary licence. The consumption of alcohol by prisoners is a cause of serious concern, not only in the context of the prison society but in communities near prisons. It can be the cause of violence and disorder within the institution or around it. Many prisoners have a history of alcohol abuse: that is a sad fact. It often causes them to commit criminal offences: my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Staffordshire was concerned about that. There is considerable evidence that, far too often, crimes are committed while persons are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Mr. Fabricant: The governor of Swinfen Hall young offenders institution says that, as well as prisoners becoming intoxicated when they leave the prison and later return, there are sometimes stills in prisons where hooch is prepared. What provisions are there to search prisoners' visitors who are obviously smuggling in alcohol or the equipment required to manufacture alcohol in prisons?

Mr. Kirkhope: That is a good point. Powers are available to the governor outside the usual security checks. The prison governor can limit the interview or meeting between a prisoner and his or her visitors and make it more restrictive if there is evidence that items are being brought in. Under the governor's authorisation, any person who enters or leaves a prison may be subject to being examined, and bags and other items are checked carefully.

Mr. Dalyell: This is a very sensitive issue and an extremely difficult one for governors. The hon. Gentleman talks about evidence; some of us might wonder what happens when there is no evidence but strong suspicion. Suspicion may sometimes not be enough, and it can create great offence to outraged relatives who come to the surgeries of Members of Parliament. This is one of the most difficult subjects of which we hear at surgeries.

Mr. Kirkhope: I fully agree. It is a sensitive area, but such powers must be available to governors to use when necessary. I accept what the hon. Gentleman says about causing offence. When perfectly innocent people visit an establishment with a particular need for security, or enter one of our airports from abroad, there is always a problem in terms of checking and searching them.

I am not certain, but I think that, in practice, the governors of our institutions will try to use the powers available to them in a reasonable manner. They are, of course, liable if they use them in a totally unreasonable manner, but they must have the authority available to them. So-called "closed visits", where a visitor is behind glass and separated from a prisoner so that items cannot be handed over, are important in that regard. An incident must have occurred if such a tight visiting regime is introduced by a governor.

Mr. Nigel Evans: It is important not to dissuade people from visiting friends and relatives, and we must be careful. The point that disturbs me is the incidence of alcohol being distilled on the premises. I find that somewhat difficult to imagine, as the prisons I have visited have strict regimes. I cannot envisage circumstances—other than with the compliance of the authorities within a prison—in which alcohol can be distilled on the premises. Surely there is a constant security regime to look for devices—not just those used for the distillation of alcohol, but drugs, explosives and goodness knows what else.

Mr. Kirkhope: I am sure that that is the case, and I agree that it would be wrong to deter visitors from going to prisons. The fact that prisoners can receive visitors can sometimes have a positive effect on their reform, and we would not want to go out of our way to be difficult in that sense.

The prison environment is very unusual, and some people in prison are extremely clever in their behaviour. They can sometimes secrete substances about themselves, and can get involved in certain undesirable activities. Most prisons would claim that their discipline is balanced and appropriate—no more, no less.

Mr. Fabricant: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend again, and I am also sorry to quote the governor of Swinfen Hall prison again; but, honestly, I would rather listen to the governor of Swinfen Hall prison than my greatly respected and decent hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on these matters. The governor

points out that, when prisoners have time on their hands—even with the education and training available in prisons—great ingenuity goes into stealing from other prisoners or, in some instances, creating stills in prison. These do exist, and we need mechanisms to ensure that those devices are not made in prisons or smuggled in by visitors.

Mr. Kirkhope: I fully agree with my hon. Friend. We have learnt a lot from the experiences of those concerned with this matter. Many prisoners have histories of alcohol abuse which have caused them to commit a range of criminal offences. Many are serving sentences for offences committed while under the influence of alcohol. It is clearly in their interests and those of the public that they have some way of controlling their alcohol consumption. Frankly, it is impossible to assess how many offences are committed because of alcohol consumption, but there is evidence that the figure is worryingly high.

Clear associations have been established between alcohol and crimes of violence and disorder in particular. In the prison population as a whole—with its far higher proportion of violent and disorderly individuals than the outside community—the consumption of alcohol can cause serious problems of order and control. I am sure that it is not necessary for me to emphasise that to the House.

Consumption of alcohol by prisoners in breach of their release on temporary licence has caused problems for innocent people in the community, and friends and families of prisoners may also be affected. Other prisoners in open prisons who are trying to come off alcohol may be pushed into temptation if alcohol is available, and prison staff have to deal with prisoners under the influence of alcohol.

The introduction of formal testing will send a clear message to prisoners that the consumption of alcohol within prisons or while released on a temporary licence with the condition of not consuming alcohol will not be tolerated. The Bill makes it less likely that prisoners will succumb to the excessive consumption of alcohol while on release on temporary licence. This, in turn, should provide the necessary reassurance to the public.

I should like to outline the background to the introduction of the Bill. Having complimented colleagues on the way in which they have spoken on the matter, it is important to see why we are where we are. During 1995, representations were received from the boards of visitors of some open prisons. The boards asked if governors were able to impose breathalyser tests on prisoners. Advice received at that time made it clear that the imposition of breath tests on prisoners was unlawful.

That concern provided the incentive for the measure that is now proposed. The governors were made aware of the legal position at that time, and of their significant powers to control the more obvious cases of alcohol misuse. Among them is the facility to include in the terms of a licence under which a prisoner may be temporarily released conditions to restrict or sometimes prohibit the consumption of alcohol. In imposing such restrictions, each case must be considered individually as part of a risk assessment procedure applied to all releases on temporary licence.

Decisions to prohibit alcohol consumption for all releases on temporary licence for any purpose may not be reasonable where there is no suggestion that alcohol has contributed in the past or might in the future to offending behaviour by an individual. When a prisoner has a condition of his licence prohibiting the consumption of alcohol, he can be charged with breaching the licence if he returns to prison exhibiting signs of the use of alcohol. The number of prisoners who have returned to establishments suffering from the worst effects of alcohol is worrying—whether from the Duck and Drake, as has been mentioned, or from anywhere else.

New conditions governing the release of prisoners on temporary licence were introduced in 1995, and it is now a standard condition of such licences that a prisoner must not enter a public house during the period in which he is subject to the licence. That might give comfort to my hon. Friends and their constituents. The condition was introduced to assist in discouraging improper behaviour by prisoners who were released on temporary licence.

In addition, governors already had certain powers to take disciplinary action against prisoners if they were seen by a member of staff to exhibit signs of being under the influence of alcohol. Those signs include slurred speech, loss of balance and breath smelling of alcohol drink. Such a rough-and-ready approach to these matters is less than satisfactory. Prisoners who are clearly rowdy or disorderly can be charged under paragraph 21 of the disciplinary code for

"offending against good order and discipline",

provided it can be shown exactly how the prisoner offended against the good order, with the consumption of alcohol being introduced as an aggravating factor in such a charge.

Establishments also have the authority to introduce a local rule prohibiting the consumption of alcohol within the establishment. In those circumstances, prisoners exhibiting symptoms of being under the influence, and who are known to have been subject to prison or young offenders institution rules when the alcohol was consumed, could be charged with failing to comply with any rule or regulation.

It is, of course, relatively easy to bring alcohol into open prisons. That is because the lower level of security and the use of temporary release facilitate the smuggling of alcohol. It is more difficult in closed prisons, because of their higher level of security, stronger physical barriers and greater emphasis on searching and related procedures. However, there are sometimes finds of illicitly brewed alcohol at establishments with higher security. My hon. Friends have raised particular concerns about the fact that there is still some evidence of illicit brewing.

I hope that the information that I have given has helped to satisfy some of the points raised and shown clearly the context in which the powers to enable prison officers to require a prisoner to provide a sample will have real value.

Mr. Dalyell: It is right that I should say that I have been greatly impressed and rather surprised by the figures that the Minister gave. I should like to thank him for his answer.

Mr. Kirkhope: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. I do not want to go back over old ground, but my officials have confirmed that the Scottish provisions will be, if not identical, then very similar to the provisions that we are considering.

[Mr. Kirkhope]

The introduction of two new prison rules specifically concerning charges relating to alcohol consumption has already assisted prison staff, as I have said, in laying charges appropriate to the offending behaviour that they observe. Formal testing, enabled through the powers to be conferred by the Bill, will provide objective evidence, which will greatly assist in the proving of charges through the adjudication process in any case where there is a suspicion that alcohol has been misused.

Hon. Members have asked what, in effect, will be the basis of the introduction following the passage of the Bill. The Prison Service intends to embark on pilot studies to find out what will be the best methods of testing. I have already referred to the most well-known forms of testing—by means of a breathalyser or by testing urine—but there are now other ways in which such tests can be carried out. Sometimes that is done on the basis of a sample of saliva, which can be taken in such a way that it is less intrusive and less likely to be objected to by any prisoner who is obliged to be tested.

Before we introduce the measures more generally, we will also want to check the effect of the pilots' operation on the incidence of alcoholism and alcohol consumption in our establishments. It is, however—it would be wrong of me to suggest otherwise—the Government's intention to ensure that these powers and provisions are introduced widely, because we believe that they make a lot of sense and that the way in which they have been promoted by my hon. Friends has shown the great importance that the public attach to our establishments being able to take care of these matters for themselves.

Alcohol will always be a problem if it is abused. It is a particular problem in a closed establishment such as a prison. Allowing the governor to have the necessary powers available and to act on the results of those powers seems to the Government to be very important.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill

Order for Third Reading read.

11.34 am

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The vast majority of our youngsters are good, caring, thoughtful, courageous, courteous and basically law-abiding people. The Bill will help to keep them that way. It will help to make our streets safer; perhaps it should have been called the safer streets Bill. Young people and all the community, especially the elderly, deserve safer streets. The Bill will make our communities and our environment in every village, town and city more pleasant places for everyone.

The Bill tackles the problem of young people drinking alcohol in public by giving the police the power to confiscate the alcohol—simply to take it off the youngsters and pour it down the nearest drain. For the police, that would be the end of the matter. There would be no criminalisation of the youngsters for having the alcohol in the first place. It would not, however, be the end of the matter for the youngsters, because the police would, I hope, take the opportunity given by the power in the Bill to inform the youngsters' parents.

The Bill helps to stop mischief before it starts. It stops young people from coming under the influence of alcohol because, under that influence, young people do things that they would not dream of doing if they were sober. They make misjudgments. They become involved in petty crime and vandalism. They mess up telephone boxes and bus shelters. They damage fences and push over garden walls. They distribute their litter liberally. Often the litter is empty discarded cans of extra-strength lager and extra-strength cider and the strange alcopop bottles.

Young people sometimes go on to act intimidatingly towards others, particularly other young people, who might be returning from a church meeting, a dance, a sports centre, a youth club or an Air Training Corps meeting. They have to pass youngsters who have been drinking, who sometimes are acting yobbishly. Those youngsters often disturb the peace for elderly people and intimidate them.

Under the influence of alcohol, youngsters become involved in serious crime as well. They can often end up violently attacking each other and other innocent members of the public. Those violent attacks can sometimes end in tragedy, as one such attack did in my constituency last year.

Youngsters can steal cars, take those cars and go so-called joyriding. I would not call it joyriding because, when youngsters take cars under the influence of alcohol and go racing around the streets—we even saw some of them live on television, tearing around council estates in cars that they had stolen—sometimes that also ends in tragedy. It can sometimes end in the death of the young person who stole the car and is driving, the death of passengers in the car and even the death of innocent members of the public, who need protection from such action.

Young people under the influence of alcohol fall victim to criminals. They are preyed on by criminals and by those who want to sell them drugs, the evil drug dealers.

The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) told me that first use of drugs mostly takes place under the influence of drink—I think the figure was 93 per cent. We have a duty to protect our youngsters from drugs and from negative street culture and the Bill will help to do that. I have a simple equation: youngsters plus alcohol on the streets equals disaster for the youngsters and for the community at large. When they abuse alcohol, young people can get a criminal record and spoil their lives at great cost not only to themselves and their families but to society generally.

Someone asked me, "Will the police have time to implement the Bill's powers?" Of course they will; that is their job, and they will have more time to take preventive measures because of the Bill. When a crime has been committed and the police have to investigate the demolition of a wall or vandalism to a car or, worse, drug trafficking, violent attacks, stealing cars and joyriding, much time is involved. They have to interview witnesses and bring people to the police station and record interviews. Before the matter is brought before the courts, they have to fill out forms and prepare documents and that takes time. If the Bill prevents crime, it will relieve the police of much negative activity and release them to take the preventative measures that the Bill offers.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North–East): I fully support the Bill. However, the worst problems occur on Friday and Saturday nights in town centres. Regardless of whether youngsters are drinking on the streets or have been drinking earlier in pubs, does my hon. Friend share my concern that too often the police want to avoid confrontation and are not prepared to be present in town centres? I hope that the Bill gives a firm message to the police that they must have a presence in town centres late at night to deal with these real and serious issues.

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We all visit our police stations and accompany officers on Friday nights. We know the modus operandi. Officers come in on overtime and dress up in their protective uniforms and sit in battle buses, waiting to be called to hot spots and at any time from 10.30 at night until 1 o'clock in the morning they go tearing out with blue lights flashing to deal with violence, intimidation and vandalism on the streets. I want to stop such crime happening by making sure that policemen are on the beat taking alcohol away from youngsters, so that hot spots do not develop.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): My hon. Friend is being a little unfair on the police. My experience of the Northumbrian police is that they do not sit drinking tea in police stations on overtime until they are called out. They are on duty and patrolling the streets. The centre of Newcastle which, to say the least, is lively on Friday and Saturday nights, is well policed in the evening.

Dr. Spink: I take my hon. Friend's admonition on the chin. I was speaking in particular about special support groups, which support community constables who do such a wonderful job. I accept every word of my hon. Friend's intervention.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): Will my hon. Friend pay tribute to special constables? In Lichfield, where there are certainly problems on Friday and Saturday nights, special constables and full-time police officers are on the streets. I hope that I shall be able to speak about that. Those officers are not sitting in battle wagons; they are out deterring crime. I welcome the Bill's powers.

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend is right. The Bill's provisions are particularly appropriate for special constables because they will enable them to implement low-level preventative measures and that will release police constables to tackle drug traffickers, fraudsters and other serious crime.

The Bill has all-party support, which I welcome. The measure is long overdue, and I thank all those who spoke in favour of it during its various stages. No one has seriously spoken against it. I particularly thank the Under–Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) for his encouragement to present the Bill in the first instance, and for his invaluable support and advice during its progress. He truly cares about his constituents and about the community that he represents so well. I also thank my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, who was the prime driving force and inspiration for the Bill. I even thank the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), the shadow Home Secretary. [*Laughter.*] Some of my hon. Friends laugh but I mean that, and shall explain why.

I was contacted by a surprised Mr. George Spink, one of the good burghers of Keighley, a town in West Yorkshire. He suggested that I might be plagiarising the shadow Home Secretary. As evidence of that scurrilous accusation, he quoted to me a *Daily Mirror* editorial of 15 February which stated that the shadow Home Secretary wanted

"a crackdown on petty crime to sweep it off the streets.

In particular he will target children, who are responsible for most of these offences. And many of whom will go on to more serious crimes.

Cutting the crime rate will not be easy. But starting like this is the best way to bring law and order to our streets."

George said that he thought those were my words, and I think that I have used similar words.

Mr. Fabricant: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It would be in the interest of the House to know whether Mr. George Spink is related to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): As usual, that is not a point of order for the Chair and means nothing at all.

Dr. Spink: We all agree with the sentiments in that editorial because they are common sense. Even the *Daily Mirror* will, I trust, give my Bill a warm welcome.

The most important step in the Home Secretary's crime-cutting odyssey is tackling under-age drinking, and the Bill does that. We had a constructive Second Reading debate and effective debates in Committee, thanks notably to my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol, North–West (Mr. Stern) and for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) and the hon. Members for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies), for Barnsley, East (Mr. Ennis) and for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton). I thank hon. Members who are present for this debate, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland),

[Dr. Spink]

and my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who presented the Bill on First Reading on my behalf, for which I also thank him.

The most important amendment in Committee was to extend the Bill's provisions to Northern Ireland. I have always wanted that. The amendment was largely a result of the efforts of the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney), who acted in the best interests not only of his constituents but of all the people of Northern Ireland. In a press statement he said:

"under-age drinking is a significant problem throughout North Down—with all the anti-social behaviour that ensues, ranging from petty crime to the intimidation of the elderly.

I have had very many complaints from constituents about drunken youths hanging round their neighbourhood, and making their lives a misery . . . The police themselves frequently claim they are powerless to intervene and curb such behaviour . . . Representing a seaside resort like Bangor also drove it home just how valuable this new law would be,".

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I am sorry to puncture the balloon of euphoria that seems to surround the Bill, which was promoted by Mr. George Spink among others. I understand the problem that the Bill is designed to tackle, but why does it apply only to young persons? Will not people of 18, 19, 20 and possibly older also be involved?

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is one of the strongest points that has been made during the Bill's passage. It would be draconian to ban all alcohol in all circumstances from public places. Anybody over 18 can in any event go into a pub to drink alcohol, and people tend to do that because it is more convivial for them. If they are under 18 they cannot, so they are forced on to the streets. The model byelaw to ban all alcohol from certain areas is a draconian measure and would be inappropriate for certain areas—for example, seaside resorts or picnic areas. How would we handle someone who was simply taking a bottle of wine to his or her home? It would cause grave difficulties. The key problem is that of under-age persons with alcohol in public, which is a recipe for disaster, and my Bill tackles that.

Mr. Fabricant: I accept my hon. Friend's argument that there might be places where it should be legal to drink alcohol, such as pavement cafés, which we have in Lichfield. Unfortunately, however, we also have in Lichfield people over the age of 18, who are drinking quite legally in pubs, pouring out on to the streets when the pubs shut at 11 o'clock on a Friday and Saturday night and continuing to drink. Why will that not be illegal under the Bill?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must now start to deal with what is in the Bill.

Dr. Spink: In such circumstances, the model byelaw for my hon. Friend's area might be appropriate, but that is not covered by my Bill.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): Unlike the model byelaw, which does not allow confiscation, my hon. Friend has a remedy in his Bill to deal with the matter immediately, and that is very important.

Dr. Spink: And it does so without criminalising the young people. There are enough ways for them to get into bother without us inventing another way today. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for clarifying that.

The hon. and learned Member for North Down has been a doughty and assiduous campaigner to defend his constituents from the effects of under-age drinking. I pay tribute to him. I know that he is concerned to strengthen the family, and there are few opportunities for us in the House to reinforce parental responsibility. The Bill is an opportunity to do that.

The Bill gives the police the power to take the names and addresses of youngsters involved in under-age drinking and then to inform the parents. It would be irresponsible to keep that information from parents, who have not just a duty but a very real responsibility to bring up their children properly. Parents must be told what their children are getting up to, so that they can take whatever action is necessary. I hope that the police will use the power to take names and addresses on every possible occasion, because it works.

The "Do you know where your children are?" campaign in Weymouth, Dorset, which successfully piloted last year some of the measures in the Bill, showed that a large proportion of parents who were informed that their children were misbehaving with drink in public took the necessary action. About 90 per cent. of the children who had been caught and reported did not come to the notice of the police a second time. Parents will act responsibly given the information, and no one should withhold that information from them. In giving the police the power to take names and address, the Bill is truly innovative in British law. I do not think that that power existed previously in British law.

Parents are sometimes not helped by the drinks industry. I think in particular of alcopops and the extra-strong lagers and ciders, which are often packaged, named and marketed specifically at young people. Some rogue companies are still acting irresponsibly and promoting those products. The Portman Group is working to resolve that problem. I say to the industry as a whole: "Get your act together, because if you don't, we will introduce measures that have all-party support in the House to bring further regulations on your industry."

There is much business on the Order Paper today, so I shall resume my seat. If there are any items of specific detail that need to be answered, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister, who has been so helpful and supportive, will deal with them, or perhaps I can deal with them if I am fortunate enough to be allowed to speak again.

11.55 am

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North–East): As I said in an earlier intervention, I welcome the Bill because it gives the police a power that does not currently exist, so I am happy to support it. However, I share some of the reservations mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), in that the Bill is limited in scope. That is not a criticism in any shape or form, because there is clearly a problem of youngsters intimidating people in public places late at night and sometimes, particularly on Saturday afternoons, in shopping centres. Sometimes that will involve alcohol, sometimes not.

Although we must address some difficult issues, such as confrontations and violence in town centres late at night, it is often people's perception and fear that is the problem rather than the actuality. It is a sad fact of modern life that many people over the age of—I have to be careful what age I say, so I shall use a low figure—25 will not go near town centres at night, because they are not pleasant places to be. If the Bill goes some way to dealing with that, I am sure that the public will be pleased.

Most young people who drink are well behaved. Most young people do not go into town centres at night to cause trouble. Most go out to enjoy themselves. Why should they not do so? We live in a society where people have more wealth at a younger age and have the money to go out and enjoy themselves. We should not lose sight of the fact that it is only a minority who go out—whether they are 17 or 18—to get drunk and cause trouble. I hope that we will bear that in mind.

Young people, who can drive at the age of 17, are far better than older people—I have to be careful of the age again, so I shall say over 40—at not drinking and driving. Regrettably, it is often older men who have not changed their drinking habits and still drive. When young people of 17 and 18 are drinking in pubs, there is always one who will not drink because he or she is driving. We should commend them for that.

I have certain reservations about the Bill, although they do not detract from my support for it. Late at night in town centres there is a fair amount of trouble—windows get broken, fights occur as well as stabbings. I suspect, however, that most of that occurs as a result not of alcohol which has been consumed on the streets, but of that which has been drunk in pubs. Although the legal drinking age is 18, many under-age youngsters will be served in pubs. No matter how much the House may regret that, that is the reality in pubs in town centres throughout the country. Many of the problems on the streets are therefore caused by alcohol that has been drunk in pubs. I readily concede, however, that it is intimidating to see youngsters not only drunk in public places, but drinking there.

As I said in my intervention, it is one thing for the House to pass legislation magisterially, it is another to ensure that the forces of law and order enforce the existing law. Much of the activity that occurs in town centres late at night could be dealt with under existing law. I have immense respect for the police, but it is a sad fact that there is a temptation not to provide a police presence in town centres at night. We should have police wandering around late at night rather than the figurative flying squad of men and women in carrier vans or in cars, who are sent in when it is too late. That often exacerbates the trouble. To make the Bill a success, the police should act like the neighbourhood bobby in town centres at night. However, unless we have a sufficient police presence, they may sometimes be the target for abuse and assault.

It is important that the police in our major town centres address the problem. That means that police forces should deploy their men and women to ensure that more of them are on duty late at night on a Friday or Saturday. They should not worry quite so much about providing police to wander around suburban streets in the middle of the day, when fewer problems are likely to occur.

I want the Bill to succeed, but that means that we must ensure that the police use its powers. That is my plea. I hope that steps can be taken to reclaim some of our town centres so that people can visit them without fear and intimidation. I am happy to support the Bill.

12.1 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I am glad to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North–East (Mr. Congdon), who made some extremely sensible comments about young people.

I served on the Committee which considered the Bill, so I have been closely associated with all its stages. It is a bit of a pity that there has been a temptation to use it as an opportunity to condemn young people's behaviour, as well as to condemn brewers and the manufacturers of alcopops. The Bill is nothing more than a law and order measure. It will be used to control disturbances caused in particular by young men who cause problems in town centres.

I hope that we are not in the middle of a Band of Hope meeting. The Bill should not be used to attack young people or drink. Drinking has an important part to play in our culture. My hon. Friend the Minister made a lengthy contribution to the previous debate, which was also on alcohol, so I suspect that he deserves a drink now. Drink taken sensibly enriches our lives; it certainly enriches mine from time to time.

We must get away from the idea that the Bill is to do with the control of the sale of alcopops or drunkenness. Public drunkenness is a problem, but it is not a new one. I do not believe that our town centres are any worse than they were 30, 50 or 100 years ago. Young men have always got drunk from time to time, and sometimes that leads to disturbances.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East that town centres today are better than they were 50 years ago. They are certainly better than they were when I was a young man. I also agree with him that young people are extremely responsible, particularly about drinking and driving.

In Newcastle, thousands of young people gather at Bigg Market on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday night. Newcastle is an important student centre, so many young people live there and go out on those nights to enjoy themselves. There are problems from time to time, but most students enjoy themselves without causing any trouble. I welcome the fact that they enjoy themselves.

Mr. Fabricant: I had the privilege to stand for the constituency of South Shields in 1987, so I am familiar with Newcastle. If the Bill had been law a few years ago, would my hon. Friend care to speculate whether Gazza would be causing fewer problems on the streets of Newcastle late at night?

Mr. Atkinson: I am a great defender of Mr. Gascoigne. He is a substantial character in the north-east; he has been involved in one or two lively incidents, but the north-east is a lively place. Mr. Gascoigne, certainly in his footballing capacity, has made a great contribution to the football culture of Newcastle, which is the UK capital of soccer.

Mr. Tim Smith: What about Chelsea?

Mr. Atkinson: I shall not go into the merits of Chelsea, but I know where my support lies.

[Mr. Atkinson]

In our discussions on the Bill a number of concerns were raised particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North–West (Mr. Stern), who is unable to be here today. There was some misunderstanding of the nature of the Bill. It gives the police powers that they need and for which they have asked; we leave it to their discretion as to how to implement it. In Committee, we made too much of a meal of the Bill's small print.

We can trust our police, who police our cities very sensitively and effectively. The police will not abuse the extra power, they will simply use it to deal with those at whom the Bill is predominantly directed—troublesome 13, 14 and 15-year-olds who are given drink. They are the young hooligans who cause so many problems in our town centres. The problems are caused not so much by older people, but by the young people who get hold of drink. One can see them in bus shelters with tins of lager—not necessarily strong lager, but ordinary lager; they are not allowed into pubs so they congregate on the streets and in town centres and cause problems, particularly for elderly people.

The Bill is not about the detail of whether the police should have the right to confiscate the drink or whether they should be certain that the bottle contains alcohol—one of the questions raised in Committee. In Committee we discussed whether the police could identify an orange substance as an alcopop or simply orange juice or lemonade. It is up to the police to decide whether they have a reasonable suspicion that what is in the bottle is alcoholic and whether they have the right to confiscate it. I believe that, if police officers take the drink from young people, they should pour it down the drain and send them home.

The Bill is not about making criminals of young people, but about preventing them from getting into trouble and becoming criminals—that is where its strength lies. When my hon. Friend the Minister outlined the Bill's provisions, he accepted that. We do not want the powers in the Bill to be used by the police to arrest 14, 15 and 16-year-olds; we want the police to take drink off such young people so that they do not move from one place to another with it. If necessary, the police should take their names and addresses. The police can then call at the parents' home—as happened with the Weymouth experiment—and say, "Do you know where your child was on Friday or Saturday? Did you know that he was drinking in the street?" That is the way to tackle drunkenness among young people. They should not be arrested and hauled before the juvenile courts. It is not sensible to make young people criminals unnecessarily.

Mr. Tim Smith: My hon. Friend has talked about not making young people criminals, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink). But clause 1(3) states that a person

"who fails without reasonable excuse to comply with a requirement imposed on him under subsection (1)"

is guilty of a criminal offence.

Mr. Atkinson: My hon. Friend is right—the Bill contains that final measure. If a person refuses to comply, he can be arrested and charged with a criminal offence. The question whether the policeman acted reasonably or unreasonably would have to be decided by a magistrate. But the spirit of the Bill is not aimed at bringing young people to court unless they are particularly obstructive or deliberately dishonest when questioned by the police. The Bill's purpose is to prevent young people from being made criminals and to allow the police to move them on and remove the alcohol before problems arise.

I shall deal with another small point that we discussed in Committee. It involves the message being sent out to the corner shop and small off-licence owners who often sell drink to under-age people. In Committee, we mentioned the case of a corner shop in Barnsley that was notorious for supplying young people with alcohol. The message emerging from the House today should go to those shopowners who continue deliberately to sell alcohol to young people. We all know the problems affecting corner shops in this country and how difficult it is for them to survive, but nothing irritates the average corner shop owner more than one owner seeking to capture the illegal market in selling drink to under-age people. That upsets all honest corner shop owners and the police. The authorities should use all their powers and employ random purchasing methods to ensure that corner shop owners do not encourage young people to drink.

Having in a sense lived with the Bill through Second Reading, Committee and now Third Reading, I welcome it. At heart, it is a good Bill, and the extra powers it gives the police will be used well and responsibly. I am sure that it will be much appreciated.

12.10 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I warmly welcome the fact that the Bill has reached this important stage. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) on having so ably and skilfully steered it through to Third Reading. I am astounded that such legislation has not been introduced before now. It strikes me as astonishing that at present, although young people are prevented from entering a pub and drinking, they are able to have alcohol in a public place. The Bill will crack down on a serious problem and block off an important loophole in the law.

The urgency is best illustrated in a report that appeared recently in, I believe, *The Daily Telegraph*:

"Police found children as young as nine drinking on street corners during a campaign to crack down on under-age drinking in Cleveland."

Over a couple of Friday nights, the police rounded up 200 youngsters who

"were made to pour gallons of alcopops, cider, lager and sherry down the drain".

Some were arrested and taken home by the police, who explained to their parents exactly what had happened. That was a large-scale operation, which was set up because of the enormous number of complaints from residents who had been victims of vandalism, intimidation and lager-loutish behaviour, and who felt completely powerless to do anything about it.

Everyone I have met, whether in the House or in my constituency, has complained about young people congregating in and around parks, bus shelters, high streets, railway stations or back streets. When in such groups, those youngsters drink alcohol, and they probably indulge in solvent abuse or even drug abuse. It is a serious

problem, and it is important that we should prevent those young people from doing great harm to themselves as well as terrorising local communities.

It is evident that the large number of young people who commit crimes—the peak age is between 14 and 17—tend to have been drinking at the time of their offence. I have no doubt that, if we can remove the curse of alcohol from them, that will be a large step forward in bringing down levels of juvenile crime.

What I find interesting is that girls are just as likely as boys to take part in these drinking activities, which is a new phenomenon that I had not previously taken on board. The fact that children as young as nine have been found carrying alcohol is cause for concern and—there is no doubt about it—we must take action fast.

As has been said, it is important that, in tackling young people's alcohol consumption, we do not merely turn them into a criminal statistic. It is important that we take preventative action—a protective course of action—and try to remove those children from the risk of danger before they cause themselves permanent harm.

Discovering the reasons why young people go down the route of taking alcohol is an integral part of the initiative that includes trying to confiscate it. Young people take alcohol for several reasons, one of which is to show off to friends. It is bravado—showing that they are one of the chaps. In my opinion, the imagery that is conveyed by society as a whole makes us all responsible. The media and commercials glamorise drinking, and it is very important for young people to be properly educated as to how to handle drink and as to the circumstances in which it is acceptable to have alcohol and those in which it is not.

Parents deserve our sympathy because when they try to instil discipline in their homes regarding the right way to drink alcohol they find their efforts undermined by the glamorisation of binge-drinking, especially when it is carried out by leading figures such as pop musicians, football stars and cricketers. Those cult figures are role models, and if they are seen to be losing control of themselves, young people are given the message that it is acceptable.

I have sympathy for parents who ban drink from the home or say to a child, "You may have some wine, but we shall water it down," which I used to find enormously humiliating when I was a small girl. My father used to rather ostentatiously pour the water into a wine glass, but he had a reason for doing so because he was trying to communicate the message that, although it is acceptable to drink, it must be done in moderation. There is a well known phrase, "A little bit of what you fancy doesn't do you any harm." However, we are discussing what happens when it goes beyond the streets of acceptability.

Sometimes young people get bizarre ideas about the role of alcohol. I have never forgotten the story of the general practitioner who had to receive a patient in his home. The patient arrived at about 10 am when the doctor was upstairs, and his five-year-old daughter received the patient, took the patient into the consulting room and asked, "Would you like a gin?" She felt that alcohol was an acceptable part of life.

As children grow up and find that alcohol is easy to get hold of, another problem arises. In high streets, young people go into an off-licence or supermarket and fool the sales girls or the shopkeeper into selling them alcohol—which, of course, is breaking the law—or send in a teenager who is over the age of 18, who can lawfully buy that alcohol and then hand it over to a younger person. That happens all too often.

The Bill has one weakness in that it deals with only the possession of alcohol in a public place. I wish that we were able to legislate more widely and insist that byelaws be enacted throughout the country to ban the consumption of alcohol in designated public places. That happens in about 33 local authorities and it should be given virtually 100 per cent. coverage as it would be a big step forward.

To return to dealing with young people, we must pass on the clear message that drinking alcohol in a public place, or at all under the age of 18, is not acceptable. Alcohol Concern supports the Bill and I welcome that fact. It is particularly concerned that more effort should go into deterring licensees from selling alcohol to those under 18. Alcohol Concern feels that more effort should be put into test purchasing, to find out which licensees are lax and sloppy about assessing whether someone to whom they are selling alcohol is over 18. Perhaps we also ought to ensure that there are more powerful penalties for licensees who break the law. Their licences ought to be suspended far more frequently and a heavy fine would certainly serve as a penalty that would deter others.

The Portman Group—an organisation set up by the leading United Kingdom drinks companies to promote sensible drinking—has, by and large, done some useful work, but I was disconcerted at its response to the Home Office consultation paper on under-aged drinking in public. The group's view surprised me as it was hostile to the Bill and claimed that it feared we were legislating in haste only to repent at leisure. The group felt that we had not paid sufficient attention to other means of educating young people not to drink in public. It is staggering that the group should take such a soft, liberal view on such an important issue. I totally discount the sort of problems that it raised.

The group felt that it was unreasonable to demand that police officers should intercept young people carrying alcohol, feeling that that would result in aggression and hostility between young people and the police. I discount that view. The police have always found when they are trying to invoke law and order that the people with whom they have to deal are not terribly pleased about being tackled, whatever the issue—whether a suspected burglar, someone committing a serious driving offence or whether in cases of vandalism, violence or under-aged drinking, which could lead to vandalism and violence. I was surprised that the Portman Group, which is so respected, should suddenly go totally soft on such an important issue.

Dr. Spink: The Portman Group has since had detailed negotiations and discussions with my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench and myself and is now broadly supportive of the Bill. It would state that the Bill is just one of a number of measures that should be taken to tackle the problem, and I think that we can all agree with that.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing me up to date. I was surprised that such a well-known and established organisation should take such a view, and I am glad that, as a result of consultation, it is now on board and with us on this important measure.

I hope that the Portman Group will now turn its attention to another enormously important matter, which relates directly to the Bill. A new form of alcohol is

[Lady Olga Maitland]

coming onto the market, of which young people are likely to take advantage: young people can now make an alcopop drink in their own homes. A company has put on to the market a product called "Splooch"—a bizarre name for a rather serious problem—which can turn a soft drink into alcohol with the equivalent strength of strong beer. It is bought in kit form and costs only £4.99. What is worrying is that the kit is promoted with a cartoon logo showing two eyes looking the worse for drink. When the makers of that home-mode hooch were challenged about it, Mr. Richard Danby of Continental Wine Experts in Norwich said:

"It is intended for the alcopop market. It is meant to be the home-brew equivalent but we are certainly not targeting under-age drinkers. It takes ten days to brew and that is a considerable disincentive."

All that I can say is that he has totally underestimated the ingenuity and determination of young people to acquire alcohol by one means or another. If they can afford to brew it from their pocket money and take it out on to the streets, it is an extremely serious matter.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: I understand my hon. Friend's concern but we must not get too excited about these matters. I remember from my youth a number of drinks that could be mixed up quite nicely—one was called a "Moscow mule", in which one could never taste the alcohol but which certainly had a dramatic effect. Those mixtures and the ability to mix drinks have always been around. Our aim should be not to run around trying to ban bits of the drink industry, which would simply make it more attractive still to young people, but to educate young people about the dangers of alcohol abuse. That is the answer.

Lady Olga Maitland: I agree with my hon. Friend that we must educate young people about alcohol abuse. None the less, when alcohol is so accessible, whether through brewing it in the home or purchasing it in shops and off licences, we must take it seriously. I am worried that this is yet another means for young people to obtain alcohol easily and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say whether the Government will consider banning drinks brewed at home and targeted at young people.

I particularly welcome the fact that the Bill confiscates alcohol not only in public places like high streets and city centres but on public transport. I raised that matter on Second Reading and want to emphasise the importance of rigorously invoking that power on buses, late-night buses and trains. It is no joke for fellow passengers and, travelling on the trains as I do, I find it extremely unpleasant to be terrorised by young thugs who are carrying drink and totally out of control. Their intimidatory behaviour is unpleasant and the filth and chaos that they create in railway carriages is deeply unpleasant. I hope that train guards and ticket collectors will be encouraged to call the police when they feel that they need help.

Finally, the Bill is important from the point of view of parental responsibility. The fact that the parents could receive a letter if a young person has been found carrying alcohol will mean that young Johnny will have to answer for what he has been doing.

The Bill will be a further deterrent, because more notice will be taken of what young people are doing. I find it amazing that youngsters, sometimes under the age of 12, are roaming round the streets late at night. I suspect that that is part of the wider problem of the breakdown of the traditional family. Young people tend to feel that they are not the No. 1 interest to either parent, because the parents have a multiplicity of partners.

Those children roaming the streets become prey to the growing problem of alcohol abuse. That is extremely serious. Some parents have opted out of their responsibilities, but that problem can now be dealt with. The letters, and even a visit from the police, will force them to recognise where they have let their children down.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point on initiating the Bill. It is significant, and I hope that it continues to have a smooth passage through Parliament.

12.30 pm

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): I agree that my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) deserves the thanks of the House for introducing this small but useful measure.

I listened to what my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) said about the danger of people being criminalised through the Bill, but only irresponsible young people, who refused to co-operate with the police, would find themselves in trouble with the law. Law-abiding young people who handed over their bottle of alcohol without demur would not suffer in any way as a result of the measure, save for being deprived of the small amount of alcohol in their possession.

In common with many hon. Members, I have received complaints from people who live near a playing field, a youth club or a public alleyway. They complain that young people congregate in public and make a nuisance of themselves, drinking, shouting, dropping litter, abusing drugs and committing criminal damage. If the adults concerned remonstrate with the young people who are acting in such an anti-social way, they often receive a mouthful of bad language for their trouble. Often, the police are then called.

Under the existing law, remedies are available to the police. They can prosecute the young people for an offence under section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986, but to succeed they would need to show that someone had suffered harassment, alarm or distress. That may be a difficult test to satisfy in a trivial case.

We do not want our courts to be cluttered with minor examples of Public Order Act offences that take up a great deal of time for the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, witnesses and the courts; nor do we want the young people concerned to acquire a criminal record for a trivial act that may arise simply from thoughtlessness, which may be alcohol-related.

If the police take no action, however, the complainant is upset and may accuse them of failing in their duty, and may complain to the local Member of Parliament that the police are powerless or unwilling to interfere.

Under the existing law, the young people could be prosecuted for dropping litter. Litter in our streets and public places is certainly a nuisance that needs to be dealt with. There is a difficulty for the police, however. If the young people causing the litter are still present when the

officer arrives, they have only to pick up their beer cans and other rubbish, and there is no crime; but if the youngsters have left the scene, it is difficult to catch them and prove that they were responsible for the litter.

Clearly, the present law is inadequate to deal with that type of nuisance. Therefore, the Bill is justified. Some hon. Members have criticised it for not having sufficient scope, but it is far better to have a small Bill of limited scope that achieves limited objectives than a wide-ranging Bill that is deficient.

12.34 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The theme for today seems to be alcohol and, more importantly, law and order. As I said earlier, I believe that law and order is the most important issue for the general public. I have held public meetings to discuss that subject, and I have also enjoyed accompanying the police on their patrols on a Friday night from 9 pm until 2 am, when I witnessed the pressures they face fulfilling their duty of protecting the public. I have also visited a residential home in my constituency to discuss the problems experienced by the elderly. Intimidation and feeling threatened by young people is a very real problem for elderly people, and I am afraid that alcohol features in that equation.

The police in Fulwood adopt a very proactive attitude when approaching young people—particularly those as young as 11 or 12—who hang around on street corners consuming alcohol. It defies logic how those young people can get their hands on alcohol in the first place. The police usually confiscate it, but there is a grey area concerning those aged 15, 16 and 17. We know the difficulties that publicans have in trying to determine, in the absence of identity cards, whether young people are aged 18. They must use their judgment and, in some cases, they get it wrong.

We must ensure that the police are given the appropriate powers to confiscate alcohol from young people who are consuming it in public places. Such activity is obviously intimidatory to others and may lead to criminal acts. Some people have referred to the measure as a killjoy Bill. I was 15 when I first entered a pub in Swansea for the odd alcoholic drink, but I can safely say that I did not roam the streets with a can of lager when I was a youngster.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) emphasised that we are talking about a small minority of youngsters. Alcohol abuse is not a common problem among young people, the vast majority of whom are honest and good. We could all point to the good work that young people do: many are involved with charities, as well as with the guides, scouts and various other groups, and not in wrongdoing. We must make sure that we do not tar all young people with the same brush. However, we must also ensure that the police have the tools with which to target the small minority, so that they may protect the rest of society and remove the stigma from all young people.

Unlike the position 20 or 30 years ago, young people these days seem to have greater disposable incomes, which they spend as they choose. The village in which the residential home I visited is situated has a problem with young people. That problem is worse during the summer months, when youngsters are on holiday and the better weather allows them to stay out on the streets for longer periods. It is a problem for some residents, who become fearful when they see young people congregating, even when those youngsters are without alcohol.

It has already been said, but I make the point again, that the "specials" do a superb job in assisting the rest of the police in dealing, for example, with the congregation of young people, with or without alcohol. I have seen the specials on the streets during weekends and other days of the week, and it is evident that their presence and that of the police generally do a power of good.

A lack of a police presence would lead to the congregating of young people, the consumption of alcohol and the problems that ensue. That is when police officers have to be taken away from other important duties to firefight, as it were, a problem that has already started. Instead, the police should be given support initially—at the stage when the specials are involved—to ensure that they can deter young people from congregating and gaining access to alcohol. I wished to give the specials a special mention.

The use of closed circuit television is useful. Such a system has been set up in Clitheroe, and I should like it extended to other areas. Problems arise when young people gain access to alcohol and then engage in criminal activities such as vandalism. That is a specific problem that can be addressed by the introduction of CCT. I hope that we shall continue with the work that has already been started under the Government in providing further resources to introduce CCT systems throughout the country.

We must not, however, forget rural areas. It is not only cities and towns that experience the problems to which I have referred. Many rural areas, such as Longbridge, would benefit from the introduction of CCT.

The Government are noted for their deregulation initiative. I warmly welcome deregulation, and since becoming a Member of this place I have seen the deregulation of licensing hours. It was thought at one time that pubs should close in the afternoon so as to correct certain problems. Pubs are now open from relatively early in the morning through until 11 pm. I should like to see further deregulation.

I am a hardened Euro-sceptic, but the rest of Europe seems to deal properly with licensing laws. I see no reason why people should not be allowed to drink in certain pubs that perhaps have special licences until 2 am, rather than being forced to go to clubs or elsewhere to drink. Why should they not be allowed to drink a little later at night? There might be a feeling within the Home Office that extended hours will only exacerbate certain problems that stem from the consumption of alcohol.

I suggest that we should further reflect on licensing hours, and not harm those who want to go about their lawful business by ensuring that pubs are closed at an unusually early hour by comparison with the rest of Europe. At the same time, we must ensure that the police have proper tools to deal with those who drink alcohol on the streets if we choose to extend licensing hours. The sooner there is an extension, the better—that is my view.

We must ensure that the police receive proper training in dealing with young people. It is important to ensure also that good relationships are maintained. We do not want to instil in the minds of young people the idea that the police are the enemy and that they are present to stop them having a good time. That is not the case. The police

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

must receive training to ensure that they are able to deal with possible problems. Certainly they should be hard on the young villains we wish to see cleared off the streets, but at the same time there should be good relations with the vast majority whose behaviour is extremely good.

It is said time and time again—I represent a rural area—that under-age drinking takes place in rural areas because there is not as much to do in the country as there is in towns and cities, where there are more facilities. We must ensure that resources provided by the national lottery are directed in part to rural areas to provide facilities that otherwise might not be affordable. Swimming pools and other facilities might help to get young people off the streets and into sporting activities. That would be extremely useful.

Alcopops have rightly been mentioned. I am alarmed that some such drinks are blatantly targeted at young people. It would be better to work with the industry rather than to legislate. Surely the industry can see the benefits of this proposal. We should ensure that young people are not targeted by the marketing of drinks that taste like lemonade, orangeade or cherryade but have a powerful kick due to their high alcoholic content.

When I was a youngster, I could buy a can of shandy in a shop. There is enough alcohol in a can of shandy to make it go brown. People will not get drunk or suffer harmful side effects from shandy, but that is not the case with these drinks.

Lady Olga Maitland: The brewing industry makes an enormous amount of money out of alcopop drinks. We are fooling ourselves if we think that a little self-regulation will be the answer. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should take tougher action, which means banning those drinks?

Mr. Evans: I usually agree with my hon. Friend in everything she says, thinks and does, but on this occasion I disagree with her. In the vast majority of cases, self-regulation, in co-ordination with the police, the Home Office and other bodies, is the right route. The drinks industry has a responsibility to its customers, to parents, as my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) mentioned, and to society at large. It should carefully consider its marketing of these drinks.

I do not believe that such drinks should be banned, because that would merely lead to people going into pubs and saying, "Please can I have a glass of orange juice and two shots of vodka," and making their own combination. I have no problem with those drinks being available already made up, but it is totally wrong for the industry to target its marketing at young people. Some as young as 16 or 17 go to have a drink without an ID card. Their taste buds are not sufficiently developed for them to like other alcoholic drinks, so they are attracted to the softer drinks, and will ask for hooch or other alcopops.

The industry must carefully examine the names of some of these drinks. It has a responsibility, and we must give it the opportunity to show that it can regulate itself. If it refuses to do so, we must consider further legislation to ensure that such drinks are not targeted at our young people.

Parents have the ultimate responsibility for their children. I am delighted that, when the police take these drinks away from youngsters, they are not just given a slap on the back of the hand and told to go away. The police get in touch with their parents, some of whom do not know what their youngsters are up to in the evenings. Even if they were given photographic evidence, some of them would deny that their little Johnny or Susie was drinking alcohol in the streets. Parents must take full responsibility for the actions of their youngsters. Perhaps they could be advised to have counselling, and be shown how they could deal with the problem of their youngster's drinking.

Some youngsters get up to far worse things than having the odd drink of alcohol. I am well aware of the drug problem, because I am secretary of the all-party drugs misuse group. We must make absolutely certain that parents are aware of their responsibilities, and that they have help to carry out their duties towards their young children.

12.48 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): I welcome the Bill, and I reaffirm that it is not meant to be an attack on young people—most of whom are very responsible and a credit to the community. It should be emphasised also that the Bill is not an attack on publicans or the alcohol industry. I ought to mention that many of the directors of Bass live in Lichfield, which is just down the road from Burton, one of the largest brewing cities in the country. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) on his Bill, and Mr. George Spink of Keighley, who played an obvious part in its drafting.

In 1994, the Home Office stated that 2,701 people under 18 had been convicted or cautioned in that year for offences related to drunkenness. Clearly, this is a great problem, which needs to be addressed. It is not just a question of drunkenness and intimidation in the street; it is more a question of perceived intimidation.

Lichfield is a small rural town—it is a city by definition, as it has an 801-year-old cathedral. There is not a great deal to do in Lichfield, although there is a pub on every street corner. There is no nightclub, bowling alley or cinema. There is certainly no youth club—not even a club run by the cathedral, which is a sad thing to report. So where do people in Lichfield get their entertainment? In pubs.

I heartily agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) that we need more flexible closing times for pubs. I raised this subject in the House about two years ago, and said that we needed staggered closing times. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) got a cheap laugh by making a sedentary comment about staggering.

It is a phenomenon in this country that people pour out on to the streets at the same time—11 o'clock. Old people, and sometimes young people, in Lichfield feel intimidated when they are out on the streets on Friday and Saturday nights in particular and see people they think are drunk and threatening. However, in my experience, although those people might be slightly drunk, they are not intimidating.

The only criticism I have of the Bill is that it addresses only young persons' drinking. Part of the problem is people who are legitimately in pubs who buy lagers as 11 o'clock approaches and then drink them in the street. I believe that staggered closing times would get around that problem.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley about the importance of closed circuit television. CCTV has been introduced in Lichfield, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department opened the operations. Not only has CCTV resulted in lower crime rates; it has deterred loutish behaviour—partly due to drinking alcohol—on the streets of Lichfield.

I have mentioned the important role played by special constables in Lichfield. Inspector Colin Bayley at Lichfield police station has told me that policing in Lichfield would fail—particularly on Friday and Saturday nights—without the worthwhile work of special constables on duty. One of the reasons I support the Bill is that it will make it easier for full-time police officers and special constables to confiscate alcohol, and pour it down the drain if it has been confiscated from young people.

Alcopops have been mentioned. I have been serving on the Committee dealing with the Finance Bill, and I want to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury. He has outlined the dangers as vividly as my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), but was slightly more practical. In this instance, he had the power to slap some prohibitive tax on alcopops. I hope that that will be a practical way of deterring people from drinking them.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am delighted at this excellent news, but what sort of tax will be imposed on this pernicious drink, which has brought so much harm to our young people?

Mr. Fabricant: It is times like these when I wish I had not given way to my hon. Friend. I refer her, however, to the Finance Bill, which has now been reported from Committee. Next week or the week after, it will be further discussed, and, if my hon. Friend goes to the Vote Office, she will be able to find out the precise amount of taxation. I wish that I could give her the information off the top of my head, but sadly I cannot.

I pay tribute to a friend of mine, Dr. Alan Howard of Cambridge university, whose son, incidentally, is the Conservative candidate in Kingswood. Dr. Howard has shown that there is some nutritional benefit in drinking alcohol. He has developed an extract from red wine called Nutrivine, which will be marketed. As I have said, we should not condemn the drinking of alcohol out of hand. There is clear medical evidence that, as with most things, if it is drunk in moderation, it can be of no harm. That is particularly so with red wine, although perhaps not quite such the case with beer. Alcohol can be beneficial, although we do not want to encourage young people to go over the top in drinking red wine.

Whether or not there is danger in the streets through young people drinking alcohol, there is a perceived danger. People in Lichfield and other places throughout this land are frightened on a Friday and Saturday night, and perhaps on other nights, of going out on to the streets when they see behaviour that they consider to be drunken, loutish and threatening. Whether it is drunken, loutish or threatening is not the point—it is perceived to be such.

It is against the law anyway to drink alcohol on the streets, but the Bill makes the life of police officers easier and means that the problem can be dealt with without giving the person apprehended by the police officer a criminal record. Surely, in the case of young people, that has to be applauded too. I welcome the Bill.

12.56 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I am pleased to give the Opposition's support to this private Member's Bill. When we were discussing the previous business, I had intended to make a terse speech, but I listened to some of the contributions from Conservative Members and I was tempted into making one or two comments, which lengthened my contribution. You will be pleased to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that, because Labour is a little short-handed, I have had one or two other duties to which to attend this morning and I have not had the good fortune to listen to some of the other contributions from Conservative Members. The consequence—I am sure that the House will welcome this—is that my contribution will be as terse as I had intended my contribution to be in relation to previous business.

The Bill is important. I got a flavour of some of the claims made by Conservative Members. It is not a particularly party political issue, but great claims have been made about sorting out all the problems of young people, under-age drinking and all the rest of it. It is naive to think that any single measure will do that. People who make that claim forget their own teenage days, their colleagues and friends and all the little pranks that everyone got up to then.

If society knew how to deal with these problems, it would have dealt with them already. It is a case of continuing to monitor what is happening and of stopping the excesses, although I do not think that we can ban particular types of alcohol easily; it would be simple for people to produce alternatives that had essentially the same effect.

During my own teenage days, young people used to get hold of all sorts of things such as Eldorado sherry, which is probably quite pleasant, but is not supposed to be drunk in pints at a time, as some of my young friends used to do. There was a drink in Glasgow called Lanliq, which I think was produced by the same company, and it was pure firewater. Young people who could not afford more expensive forms of intoxication often got dragged into the Lannie queues.

Citizens, be they under or over 18, should not be intimidated by others drinking in public places. That is anti-social and, if the Bill does nothing other than prevent that, thus giving people a little more peace in their streets and in their communities, it will achieve a great deal. I hope that it achieves more and leads to a reduction in under-age drinking and excessive drinking generally. I also hope that it will lead to better behaviour by youngsters.

The Bill is consistent with our general approach to community safety orders, which are intended to give people peace in their environment. No one would claim that legislation will turn things around overnight: it is a matter of making a start and trying to improve difficult situations.

I was impressed by the effect of banning alcohol at football grounds; I am not able to make the same argument in the context of cricket grounds, because I have been a football spectator all my life. A football ground is private, but it is comparable to a public place and I can remember when people were allowed to take alcohol into

[Mr. Doug Henderson]

grounds. There was much aggravation, intimidation and harassment of decent football supporters by people who, when they were not intoxicated, were reasonable citizens. People who are intoxicated, especially when they are in large groups, can be incited into committing acts that they would not otherwise commit. That means that they are, at best, anti-social at a football ground and, at worst, committing criminal offences.

My experience at football grounds convinces me that, if access to alcohol can be stopped in some situations, it will lead to better behaviour and peace in that environment. That is an important reason for giving the Bill a Third Reading. Time will tell whether it is effective, but I hope that it has the impact intended.

1.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): In one way or another, we seem to have had a somewhat boozy morning. We have debated alcohol in two Bills, but the subjects that we have debated have had more to do with where alcohol can cause considerable problems and nuisance, such as in public places or in the closed environment of a prison.

The question of testing for alcohol, which we discussed earlier, applies to some extent to this Bill. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) on the Bill, which he has taken through the various stages with skill, expertise and considerable commitment. I suspect that some parents might also like a power to test for alcohol. Although it cannot be provided in the Bill, it is right to reassure parents that the police will be on their side in helping them to deal with a problem that can occur from time to time with young people. Sometimes, parents do not know whether their teenage children are consuming alcohol in a public place: the parents may know that their children are out, but they cannot be sure what the children are getting up to.

As we know, most youngsters behave in a community-spirited way and perhaps contribute more to society than previous generations. I would be the last to criticise their contribution, but it is important that the Bill gives the police power to ascertain the name and address of a young person from whom they confiscate alcohol. I am also confident that, if the matter is brought to the attention of parents, as is allowed for by the Bill, the vast majority will confront their children about it. That might lead to greater family understanding of a controlled and sensible approach to alcohol.

Alcohol can, of course, lead youngsters to get themselves into a lot of trouble and do things that they bitterly regret later. Drunkenness may lead to general bad behaviour, shouting at passers-by and oafishness, but it can also lead to criminal activity, as we heard in an earlier debate today. Research shows that many crimes are alcohol-related.

Apart from the danger that young people can take that step towards crime, it is also true that many members of the public will find the sight of youngsters the worse for drink somewhat disturbing; they can be offensive. I am sorry that my hon Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) is not here today, for he has taken a considerable interest in the Bill. On Second Reading, he revealed that he is 5 ft 5 in tall. That is a very good height to be, but I hope that I am not alone in noticing that young people these days seem to come a lot bigger than that. Lads of just 13 or 14 can seem very threatening when they are fooling about and behaving badly because they have had too much to drink; so, for that matter, can young girls—this is not a problem that relates only to boys.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point made clear, there is currently a loophole in the law. The Licensing Act 1964 prohibits young people under 18 from purchasing alcohol in licensed premises, and adults from buying alcohol to give to young people to drink in licensed premises, but it does not prohibit young people from consuming alcohol in any place other than licensed premises.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point referred to deregulation, and, as the Minister with responsibility in the Home Office for deregulation—particularly licensing—I can say that applying extra restrictions is something that I consider carefully. Deregulation can work only if it is based on a need to continue to protect the public from abuses that can occur. Getting that balance right is difficult for the Government to achieve. The Bill is an important component and does not necessarily attack the continued need to investigate deregulation opportunities.

Although the police take enforcement of existing legislation very seriously, if they see young people who appear the worse for drink, they are restricted in what they can do because the young people and any adults with them are not committing an offence. The police have, of course, been trying to do their best. I know that all hon. Members are well aware of the initiative started by the police in Weymouth, to which my hon. Friend referred, which was a response to the problem of under-age drinking in public areas.

The initiative involved videoing children drinking alcohol and then taking them back to their parents, who were then shown the video. It has been a great success and has encouraged parents to take responsibility for their children. I find it particularly encouraging that parents have been very ready to do that, and few of the youngsters who were videoed have come to the attention of the police again.

However, officers do not always have a video camera to hand. The police need a quick, on-the-spot solution that can be used at any time. That is what the Bill provides. Once enacted, it will be available to an officer throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We extended the Bill to Northern Ireland in Committee. A similar measure for Scotland is contained in the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill. Any officer who is concerned by a group of youngsters who are drinking will be able to act immediately to stop the problem.

The Bill has been considered with great thoroughness in Committee, and I compliment all hon. Members who were on that Committee on their diligence in carrying out their task. I remind the House that the Bill gives the police the power to confiscate alcoholic drinks, or those that appear to be alcoholic, from any person under the age of 18 if they are in a public place or, indeed, a place to which they have unlawfully gained access. It also gives the power to confiscate alcohol from anyone who has reached the age of 18 if the police have grounds to believe that the person concerned will give it to a young person in their company.

The House will note that the Bill gives the power of confiscation to any police officer. As the House will recall, before the Bill was drawn up we consulted widely. The consultation paper originally suggested that the police officer should be in uniform. The Association of Chief Police Officers responded by saying that that could cause problems. It considered that there might be times when a plain-clothes officer would wish to make use of the power, so the Bill has been drafted in that way and the power applies to any officer.

The House will also note that the police are given a power to confiscate anything that is, or that the constable reasonably believes to be, intoxicating liquor. That is so there can be no argument about whether a drink is alcoholic. We had a long debate about that in Committee, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West was concerned that the police might confiscate something that was not alcoholic. I appreciated his concerns. We discussed the difficulties that the police might have in distinguishing between alcopops and what might turn out to be just lemon pop—in other words, a soft drink.

I do not want to debate alcopops now—I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would not allow me to do so—save to say that I share my hon. Friends' concern. I welcome the initiative taken by the Portman Group; indeed, I spoke to its director, Jean Coussins, just a few days ago. The House should continue to monitor the matter closely, because some of the industry's assurances have not been satisfactory.

There was one flaw in the Bill, which was spotted by my hon. Friend for Bristol, North-West. In the Bill as originally drafted, an officer had the right to dispose of the intoxicating liquor which was surrendered to him. My hon. Friend asked whether the officer had the right to dispose of a drink that he genuinely believed to be intoxicating, but about which he was mistaken. Now, it might be said that that was unlikely, or even that it could not be proven, because the evidence would be literally down the drain, but we did not want there to be any doubt about the police powers.

It would be unfortunate if someone with a bent for litigation were to rootle around in a waste bin, find the can from which the police officer had poured away the drink and then, assuming that there was a drop or two left in the bottom, send that off for analysis. He might strike lucky—no alcohol would be found. He could then try to bring a suit against the police for wrongful confiscation. Obviously, we do not want to run that risk, even if it is a remote one. An amendment was accepted in Committee giving the police the power to dispose of anything that was surrendered to them.

The House will also note that the police have the power to confiscate the alcohol in any public place. That is an important matter, because what is a public place? It is, of course, a place to which, at the material time, the public or any section of the public has access on payment or otherwise, as of right or by virtue of express or implied permission. It is important to ensure the police have that power, whether the youngsters are in a park, sitting on a bench in the street, congregated around the bus station, outside a take-away, in a shopping mall or cinema, or trespassing in someone's garden or in school grounds, when they should not be there.

It is an offence under the Bill for a person either to refuse to hand over the alcohol or to refuse to give his or her name and address when requested to do so. In Committee, we debated the nature of the fine if a person refused to do so. It was important to set it at a sensible level—currently £500. The Bill also gives the police a power of arrest. That should be used in extremis, but it is essential that that power is available to them.

I hope that the Bill will lead to fewer young people coming before the courts, because youngsters will not go on to commit the kind of offences that we know they commit when drunk. They should quickly learn that they will not be permitted to drink in public. The fact that we are not adopting a criminal approach in the initial stage of the Bill's implementation is the right way to deal with the problem when it occurs.

A discretionary power is available to the police. They do not have to confiscate alcohol. There may be an occasion when a group of young people have a picnic to celebrate their A-level results and drink a spot of cider. An officer may suspect that one or two of them are under 18. The Licensing Act 1964 provides that youngsters under the age of 18 but who have reached the age of 16 may consume beer, or cider, or perry on licensed premises provided they do so with a meal. If that group of youngsters are behaving themselves and are not drunk, the officer may properly decide to use his discretion and turn a blind eye to the fact that some of them look a trifle young. Similarly, if he sees a family on the beach and one of the children has a sip of wine, he will not be expected to go and remove it. For such legislation to work, a certain amount of common sense is required. I am proud of the fact that our police forces are extremely sensible in their approach; we can rely on them to apply common sense.

I feel confident that the legislation will help to improve the quality of life of many of our constituents. I heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) said about all the things that are not available in Lichfield, but he missed an important one: Lichfield does not have a Labour Member of Parliament, which is an extremely good thing for his area.

I am pleased that the Bill has all-party support. The way in which the debate has been conducted has been an excellent example of all-party co-operation. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Road Traffic Reduction Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Order for Third Reading read.

1.15 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

When I moved Second Reading, I explained that we had to consider many problems and introduce legislation to try to overcome them. I listed some of those problems, not least that of congestion on our roads, which is now estimated to cost British industry about £19 billion a year. Industry suffers further from the cost of days lost at work due to road accidents—one estimate puts the cost to industry at a further £6.5 billion.

There are also health problems: we know that about 15 million people suffer ill health as a result of pollution from traffic on our roads. Sadly, at least one estimate suggests that as many as 10,000 people a year are dying prematurely because of pollution from road traffic.

On the wider environmental front, road traffic causes other problems. It contributes significantly to global warming. Road traffic also significantly depletes our scarce resources. About one third of all our energy is consumed by road traffic and about 80 per cent. of that by cars on our roads.

There are significant problems, which we need to address. As many people and organisations wanted to address those problems, I was not too surprised to find that there was wide support for the Road Traffic Reduction Bill. Some 235 hon. Members from both sides of the House signed an early-day motion. Other supporters include the National Trust, the Countryside Commission, the National Play Council, the townswomen guilds, Friends of the Earth and the Green party—those last two organisations played a significant part in the early drafting of the Bill.

I should like to pay particular tribute to Mr. Ron Bailey from Friends of the Earth, who has played a significant role at all stages of the Bill's development. About 240 local authorities have supported the measures contained in the Bill. I do not know whether or not Mr. George Spink, whose name has cropped up so frequently during today's deliberations, is a supporter of the Bill but, given the wide support for the measure, it is likely that he is.

Although many organisations supported the Bill's broad principle and saw the need to overcome many of the problems that I have mentioned, a number of organisations and individuals had some concerns about the Bill as it was formulated and presented on Second Reading. I am therefore delighted to report that, in a productive sitting, the Committee was able to address many of concerns expressed by those organisations, and by the Minister for Railways and Roads on Second Reading. At this point, I should like to put on record my tribute to the Minister for the gracious, constructive and helpful way in which he entered into discussions with me and the other promoters of the Bill to make sure that we were able to find amendments that would satisfy the concerns that he and others had expressed and address those felt by some other organisations.

As a result, three main changes have been made to the Bill since Second Reading. First, in Committee we agreed that it would be inappropriate at this stage to have on the face of the Bill specific reference to national targets. There are many—I confess to being one—who believe that it is a good idea to have national targets for road traffic reduction, but nevertheless the Minister and others put forward convincing arguments as to why it was inappropriate to include them on the face of the Bill, and the Committee accepted that. Secondly, for reasons that are fairly clear, and because there are different arrangements in Northern Ireland, it was decided to exclude Northern Ireland from the scope of the Bill. Thirdly, we ensured that much of the material that had appeared on the face of the Bill would, in future, appear in guidance.

As a result of those changes, I am pleased to be able to say that many of the organisations that had expressed concerns about the Bill now say that they are far more satisfied and I shall quote two of them. The note prepared for hon. Members today by the Automobile Association says of the Bill:

"we hope its seemingly genuine intent can lead to sensible and popular local schemes being funded and implemented. We do not wish to stand in its way and hope the efforts of those that have carefully steered it through a difficult path are rewarded."

The Confederation of British Industry has also accepted the broad thrust of the Bill as it now stands. Understandably, the CBI begins its notes by saying that it is

"deeply concerned about traffic problems such as congestion . . . However, the Bill as it now stands has been significantly improved, and many of the problems associated with the original draft have now been overcome. In particular the greater flexibility given to councils should allow them to take better account of local conditions."

In passing, I point out that one of the other changes that we made in Committee was to restrict the requirements contained within the Bill to those principal councils that are themselves local authorities. However, we rightly made it clear—as did the Minister in his contributions in Committee—that those principal councils will be expected to consult widely with other local authorities in their area, and I hope that that will include, for example, parish councils. We also said that there must be consultation with other organisations; specific reference was made to the importance of consultation with businesses—something about which the CBI is understandably concerned and keen to ensure—and with organisations such as environmental groups in the highway authority's locality. The CBI concludes its note by saying:

"If the Bill now acts to focus attention on the need for action and investment to tackle transport problems then this would be welcomed."

Indeed, many people will welcome the contents of the Bill.

It has been suggested by some that, because we were prepared to make several amendments in Committee, the contents and powers of the Bill have been significantly watered down. I want to disabuse the House of that idea. In my view, and that of very many members of the Committee, the main thrust of the Bill is retained in the revised version.

It is interesting to read some of the comments that were made in Committee; specifically, I shall quote those of the Minister. Referring to new clause 1, now clause 2—the kernel of the Bill—he said:

"I do not believe that the clause represents a significant weakening of the obligations that we place on highway authorities. After all, a highway authority must, at such time as the Secretary of State directs, prepare

'a report containing an assessment of . . . traffic . . . and a forecast of growth . . . .'

It must also specify targets for reducing traffic, or the rate of growth, except under subsection (5), where an authority might determine that it is not appropriate, in which case it must give its reasons. As I said earlier, it will not be sufficient for an authority to say that that is a load of rubbish and refuse to do it. In preparing its report, a highway authority is also required to have regard to the guidance that the Secretary of State will issue which will give a clear steer as to what is required."

That quote and subsections (3) and (6) of clause 2 are very important indeed, because in both it is clear that all local authorities, in drawing up their reports and developing their targets, must have regard to the guidance that will be issued by the Minister.

The Minister kindly and generously prepared in advance of Committee, and circulated to all members of the Committee, a draft of the main headings, so we had a very clear idea what the guidance that he is proposing will cover. The Minister made it clear, in his contribution in Committee and in the headings in that guidance, that much of the content of the suggestions that appeared in the Bill on Second Reading will now appear in the guidance, so that local authorities may consider the measures that were suggested. Local authorities that have developed successful schemes, perhaps in consultation with local businesses and other organisations, will thereby be able to share what they have learned with a wider audience.

As the Minister said in Committee, and as has made clear in the guidance notes, there will be a clear link between the funding that local authorities receive and their proposals for road traffic reduction. It is important to remind the House of what he said in Committee.

"I shall attempt to make it clear in the guidance that I expect there to be a clear direct link between the bids for resources made through the TPP process and the authority's reasons for believing that that investment would help to achieve the targets. That is a fairly persuasive power. If I felt that an authority were dismissing the requirements in a cavalier way, it would not receive funding for its projects. Those who made a case for investment that was well reasoned, well thought out and closely related to their targets would be rewarded."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 19 February 1997; c. 29-30.]

It is clear from the contributions of all hon. Members, but especially that of the Minister in Committee, that the main thrust of the Bill as originally proposed has been retained in the Bill as it stands on Third Reading, backed up by the guidance. If that is correct, I hope that the Bill receives a Third Reading and quickly passes through its remaining stages. It will be a major step forward in the fight, which we must all join, to reduce the traffic on our roads.

Only yesterday, I was out with a camera crew making a film about the Bill. For part of the film, I got into the cab of a lorry to interview the driver and to discuss some of the problems of road traffic. It was perhaps ironic that we were unable to do all the filming that we had planned because the lorry, its driver and I were stuck in a traffic jam for more than three quarters of an hour. While we were stuck, I talked to some of the drivers of the other business vehicles. One man was sitting with all his papers spread out, wisely using the time to get on with his paperwork.

I asked another man, who worked for a courier firm, how long he had been there and what impact the jam would have on him. He said he had been there more than three quarters of an hour and pointed out that courier firms like his have to work to tight deadlines—they have to deliver on time or they do not get paid. He said that he would lose business and income because of the congestion.

Other motorists talked about their problems because of the shortage of public transport in their area. One thing that I hope will happen because of the Bill and the measures contained in it is a further development of public transport in many parts of the country.

The Bill is a major step forward. It will begin to tackle the problem from the grass roots up, and will be developed by those who know their local areas best—the local authorities. It will develop measures that will make the quality of life much better for all our constituents. Therefore, I hope that the Bill will receive a Third Reading.

1.30 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I find myself in something of a dilemma, as I was on Second Reading. Every hon. Member accepts that there is a problem with road traffic congestion but, just because there is a problem, it does not mean that the first solution that someone brings along is necessarily the right one. To raise a voice of doubt is not to say that the problem does not exist, but to ask whether the solution has been correctly identified.

Having said that, I should pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) for the way in which he has handled himself during the progress of the Bill. He has adopted a realistic approach and, as a result, looks likely to achieve Third Reading.

I should have liked the Bill to receive more scrutiny—that is not merely a plea because I was not a member of the Standing Committee, as I would have liked to be. We had a short Second Reading debate for such important legislation, and now we are now doomed to have a short Third Reading debate.

As I said on Second Reading, the Bill falls victim to the great delusion that legislation can of itself change the world. I do not believe that. Legislation has a role—to control or regulate where possible and sensible and to punish a misdemeanour. I am not convinced that the Bill does either. Nor am I convinced by the need for this legislation.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North–East): My hon. Friend has picked up the essence of the dilemma about the Bill, which I am happy to support—the danger of it being a wish list. We wish road traffic to be reduced but the biggest driver—if my hon. Friend will pardon the pun—of the increase in road traffic is the increase in gross domestic product and economic growth. Regardless of what plans councils put in place, that increase will have the greatest significant impact on traffic growth. The best way to reduce traffic—I hope that no one does it—would

[Mr. David Congdon]

be to vote in a Labour Government, who would destroy the economy, so we would not get the growth or the traffic.

Mr. Luff: My hon. Friend has made a party political point, but he is right. It is inevitable that traffic levels will continue to grow, and those who pretend otherwise are flying in the face of economic forces that are beyond the power of this House to control—even, I suspect, in the unfortunate event of a Labour Government. People's demand for increased personal mobility would still lead to increased traffic growth.

I fully share the ambition of the hon. Member for Bath to reduce traffic congestion, particularly in towns. He and I come from historic cities, where traffic congestion is a problem—a greater problem in Bath than in Worcester, in my view. Any reduction in congestion is a good thing, as is any reduction in pollution and any improvement in air quality. Reduced congestion is likely, however, to lead to an increase rather than a decrease in accidents, as traffic starts moving faster and does more damage to pedestrians.

The Bill has a noble objective. I am a railway enthusiast; I am vice-president of the Severn Valley railway, a modest shareholder in Railtrack and an enthusiast for the rail privatisation process. I believe that improving public transport is a helpful way of reducing demand for road traffic. Brian Scott, managing director of Great Western Trains, said that his ambition was to empty the M4. I suspect that that ambition will do more than the Bill.

Roger Macdonald of Thames Trains, another private railway franchise that now serves my constituency, publishes bus connections in his timetable. The old British Rail never did that, but it is a powerful way to help people gain better access to public transport and thus reduce the use of cars. Incidentally, he has also introduced Sunday morning services, which British Rail said could not be done. Improved public transport through good privately run railways has much more impact on road traffic than the Bill.

I said on Second Reading that I feared that the Bill was anti-car. On balance, I am satisfied that it is not, although the House should send out the message that we are not anti-car. The car is profoundly important for the freedom of movement of our society—a fundamental right in a modern, sophisticated, industrial democracy. I come from the west midlands, so I must recognise the large dependence of my constituents and those around me on the manufacturing processes in many midlands motor vehicle factories that build cars and supply components.

I was delighted to see an article by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport in *The Times* in January, in which he said:

"I see the car as a vehicle for increasing choice, freedom and opportunity."

He then made a particularly important point:

"Wider car ownership has meant a huge expansion in the availability of employment, particularly for disabled people, who would find it a real struggle to use public transport."

The car brings huge benefits to our society, and the House should leave the world outside in no doubt that it shares that view.

The trouble is that we all want to reduce other people's car use while being allowed to use our own car freely. That is the hypocrisy of so many positions taken in this great debate. It is certainly the hypocrisy practised locally by Hereford and Worcester county council. The chairman of the transport committee lives in the north of the county and favours regional government. He has no great interest in the problems of the south of the county and certainly no interest in the city of Worcester, which was one reason for beginning the ill-thought-through experiment to reduce traffic. I discussed that plan previously in the House and at a meeting with my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads, when he took a most intelligent view of it. The plan was driven through with no effective consultation with local people. It took no account of major changes that are about to be implemented: the Worcester western bypass opens shortly, and there is a large quantity of Government money to build a much-needed relief road for the western side of Worcester.

I was proud to bring a delegation to the Minister and to face down the arrogance of the Lib-Lab pact in Worcestershire, which has been shocked by the outcome of the meeting, and has lost its package bid for this year. That is good. Not only has it stopped ill-thought-through schemes on which inadequate consultation has been conducted, not only has it delayed the destruction of a playing field for a park-and-ride scheme in a totally inappropriate part of the city, but, miracle of miracles, it has forced the county council to start to listen to local people. It now says that the views of Councillor Derek Prodger, leader of the Conservative group on Worcester city council and a county councillor—that the problems could be addressed in other ways and the schemes modified—could be the right approach after all.

Bizarrely, Worcester city council wants to frustrate the development of Worcester's new hospital because the hospital could generate increased traffic volumes. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will deal with that important point when he replies. Inevitably, developing areas will experience increases in traffic. A new factory or housing estate will inevitably cause increased traffic levels, as will Worcester's new hospital. All that is happening in Worcester without the incentive provided by the Bill.

The hon. Member for Bath read out the Minister's comments in Committee about how funding was likely to work in the future. It will increase the pressure on councils which, like Hereford and Worcester, I believe are anti-car, to behave irresponsibly and in a way that may damage the local economy.

We are in a desperate battle for survival in Worcester. We face the competition from Merry Hill, an out-of-town shopping centre built for the car. Parking there is easy. Cheltenham, down the road, represented by a colleague of the hon. Member for Bath, is a user-friendly city for the car, where parking is relatively easy. People will be driven out of Worcester if our county council, under the incentives of the Bill, undertakes ill-thought-through schemes which drive people into the arms of Merry Hill and Cheltenham.

I mentioned hypocrisy, and the fact that we want to reduce other people's use of the car, but not our own. Go to county hall car park any working day of the week and see the hundreds and hundreds cars there, belonging to county council employees and councillors. A council that was serious about reducing traffic would not rely on Bills such as the one under discussion, but would impose car parking charges on its employees, so that they were inhibited from using cars. It would introduce incentives

to encourage its employees to cycle or walk to work, or to use the good bus service to county hall. The council car park is stuffed full of cars, while the council tries to stop my constituents getting about in their own city.

I have deep reservations about the Bill. I accept that it has been improved, but I worry about the impact on local bypasses, for example. My hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads suggested in Committee that bypasses for villages—I think particularly of the Wyre Piddle bypass, which I discussed with him—would not be adversely affected by provisions in the Bill. Traffic reduction in a village like Wyre Piddle might lead to increased traffic levels elsewhere, but reducing traffic in that village is crucial to the well-being of people there.

Let me labour the consultation point. The people of Wyre Piddle have been listened to. Their parish council has been effective and, to be fair to the county council, their voice has been heard. I have other parish councils in the Worcester city area, in Wornden and St. Peter's, which are not looked upon particularly favourably by the Labour city council.

I am concerned that the guidance issued by the Department of Transport under the Bill should take full account of the views of parish councils, which are overlooked in too many local planning issues that affect those communities. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reassure me that, in the consultation required under the Bill, there will be a special place for parish councils, as I hope there will be for businesses and schools.

Schools rely increasingly on the school run. My son goes to school by car, burdened down by an incredible volume of books, bags and so on. It is not possible for him to walk or take a bus to school. He relies on the car. Ill-thought-through traffic schemes in one part of Worcester could make my son's and daughter's schools inaccessible to people with cars.

I hope that there will be consultation with businesses, schools and parish councils. The consultation process could be the most important aspect. By forcing communities to examine the issues, it may produce intelligent debate about ways of reducing road traffic, which might be the healthiest outcome of the Bill. Building a consensus locally about what is needed, through good, effective—not grudging—consultation might be a positive outcome of the Bill.

I accept that the Confederation of British Industry has changed its position on the Bill to some extent since Second Reading. It states that the Bill has been significantly improved in Committee, but comments—fairly, I think—that the real need is to increase investment in the infrastructure and public transport of our country, not to use quick-fix legislative devices such as the Bill. That is happening in the railways through privatisation, and in the road building programme through the private finance initiative.

The British Road Federation, too, has modified its objections to the Bill. It states:

"The latest version is brief"—

that in itself is a commendation for a Bill—

"and an improvement on its predecessor."

It expresses concern, however, about whether the Bill sets the appropriate tests to establish whether our environment is improving. Should we be targeting congestion, or air quality, for which the Department already has targets? Are road traffic levels really the crucial test? I share that doubt.

I shall not weary the House any longer, as I know that other hon. Members want to speak on this important Bill. I still have reservations about it. It betrays a touching faith in the power of legislation to change the world. However, it is not as bad as it was on Second Reading, so I have no objection to its further progress.

1.44 pm

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) for persevering with this matter, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on bringing the Bill to this stage. I join him in thanking Friends of the Earth and Transport 2000.

The hon. Gentleman raised some important issues, including congestion, pollution, and the cost of both to the economy and to personal health. While I share the view of the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) that benefits—such as increased personal mobility and social advantages—have accrued from wide accessibility to the motor car, we cannot continue to respond to road building in a totally unplanned and demand-led manner. We know that building more and more roads would lead to greater demand and increased car use, until eventually the M25 would cover the entire south of England.

We must tackle the problem by making it easier to use other means of transport. The Government and local authorities can achieve that aim through co-operative investment in public transport schemes and certain areas of planning. The hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) referred to bad planning policy, but we should look at examples of good planning. For example, I commend the recent decision by the Secretary of State for the Environment to refuse the car parking extension that was planned for the Queen Elizabeth hospital in my constituency, which would have encouraged people to travel to that hospital by private transport.

However, if the Secretary of State is correct in curtailing the availability of parking at the hospital, it must also be correct for Government to ensure that there are adequate public transport facilities for people to travel to the hospital. Unfortunately, the privatisation of public transport has prevented adequate provision, and the health care trust must subsidise the cost of public transport to the hospital, which is crazy. [*Interruption.*]

Despite some muttering from Conservative Members, there is a great deal of constructive all-party consensus about the issue—particularly in Committee. We could not have had this debate four or five years ago. I pay tribute to organisations such as Friends of the Earth and Transport 2000 and to those people who have adopted less conventional methods of drawing our attention to the dangers of ever-increasing car usage. They have played a constructive role—although I do not expect all Conservative Members to agree with me.

A few years ago, the Government proposed to build a motorway in my constituency through a site of special scientific interest at Oxleas Wood. They have now withdrawn that proposal, but I do not share Conservative Members' confidence in the private finance initiative. Although the Government have dropped their plans to

[Mr. John Austin-Walker]

build a motorway across the Thames in east London—which would have doubled car traffic in my constituency and in Eltham—they support a private sector design, finance, build and operate initiative for a toll bridge in that area.

I agree with the comments the hon. Member for Worcester about the availability of car parking. It is a hidden subsidy on the car user and, if it were taken into account when assessing the relative costs of public and private transport, it would tilt the scales in favour of public transport. Local authorities should examine that matter in terms of the guidance that they must issue under the Bill. I do not agree that the Bill is anti-bypass. The Minister and I made that point in response to the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller). In some cases, a bypass may reduce congestion and pollution and increase quality of life.

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology has referred to transport sustainability and the growth in carbon dioxide emissions. It has said that, if road traffic is to do its pro rata share of reducing national emissions of carbon dioxide, vehicle mileage must be reduced by between 20 per cent. and 33 per cent. Local authorities can play an important part in producing plans that could lead to a reduction in car usage. We are not opposed to car ownership but we are trying to reduce reliance upon the private vehicle while improving public transport.

As the hon. Member for Worcester said, accessibility to schools should not be accompanied by bad planning. Local authorities can do a great deal to encourage shared car use and safe routes to school. There are many examples of good practice in many areas.

I welcome the decisions that the Secretary of State has taken more recently against out-of-town shopping centres. These centres have increased car usage and have reduced the quality of life of many people in city areas who do not have access to a private motor vehicle. In many instances they have lost shops, the local post office, the local chemist and the rest. Those people should have their interests taken into account.

I share the view expressed by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson). I, too, am sorry that targets have not been set out in the Bill, as we would have liked. That, however, is not an argument for opposing the Bill. The measure is a good first step in the right direction. I hope that in the next Parliament we shall build upon it.

There are benefits to be obtained from sound planning policies, including encouragement to use public transport. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South mentioned his twin town of Karlsruhe, where passengers can use a tram and arrange for the driver to telephone for a taxi, which will pick them up on leaving the tram. There are many imaginative proposals to enable local authorities to work with and develop public transport undertakings and cab operators.

I commend the Bill. It is the first step on the right road. I hope that it will receive support from hon. Members on both sides of the House.

1.51 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): I am grateful to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I have a personal interest because I am chairman of the all-party urban affairs group. I have no financial interest. At the same time, I have been concerned for many years about the vital issue of reducing traffic in our cities as an agent of economic growth, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon).

I very much support the spirit that lies behind the Bill and I am glad that the measure has been introduced. It is clear that the Bill will stimulate debate. With great respect, I do not agree with the proposed solution as a whole. At the same time, however, I agree with part of it. If we only debate these great issues, having been stimulated by my friend, if I may so call him, the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), he has done us a service. I have much respect for the hon. Gentleman, bearing in mind his interventions in Committee when we considered the Education Bill. I found the hon. Gentleman's contributions to be helpful and constructive. I was muzzled as a mere parliamentary private secretary, but I listened carefully to him.

Road traffic reduction is subject to about eight principles, which I shall go through quickly. There is a series of rights and wrongs that represent the way to go forward. I have many points to make because I have thought about the issues over many years. First is the guiding principle that we should have freedom to choose. The individual should be free to choose the best way of reducing road traffic and emissions, for example. We do not want to get into the French and/or socialist technique of dirigisme, of control from the centre—"You may not use your car or bus, whatever, on the streets."

We should reduce traffic not only for the eminent reasons that are stated in the excellent document from the Library, but because of my second principle, which has to do with the character of our neighbourhoods and cities. That is being destroyed by the practice of in-filling between houses, which has been the guiding rule of planners. As a consequence, more and more cars are on the street. The spaces by the side of our homes where cars could be parked have been used for more houses. Lateral thinking is required from the Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport, so that planning and transport decisions can be linked.

My third principle concerns the interchange of transport—intermodality is the modern phrase—which is desperately important. To my horror and shame, because it occurred under a Conservative Government, Liverpool Street station, the great cathedral to modern railways, was refurbished without provision for a car park. No thought was given to providing adequate interchange between different modes of transport. How many hon. Members know of a bus stop, apart from the out-of-city, park-and-ride facilities, that has a dedicated car park? People have not thought through the problem of intermodality: changing from a car to public transport. That applies right through the system.

No group of people in Imperial college in London or in the Department of Transport is dedicated to intermodality. There are dedicated groups to study transport, water, rail, road and air, but there is no dedicated group to consider ways of getting people from one means of transport to another. There should be, and we should have a debate about it.

My fourth principle is the provision of more comfortable transport. We should think about comfort in transport to magnetise people away from their cars—their metal capsules—and into public transport. I have thought

for many years that the Thames could be an amazing facility for public transport. Boats could come up from Woolwich, on which breakfast could be served. They could be comfortable boats of the future, and could have car parks at the access points. There is scope for greater comfort in public transport to encourage people to use it.

My fifth principle is that councillors throughout the country should be given guidance on best practice. The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin–Walker) referred to the practice in Germany.

My sixth principle is the better use of science: reference to that has already been made. The experiment with hopper buses is a fascinating example of the better use of public transport, and has led to much reduced emissions. They could be used by elderly folk or people who would otherwise be tempted to use their cars for lack of comfortable transport. We should be imaginative and use science better.

My seventh principle relates to what the hon. Member for Bath said, with which I partly agree. We should put this matter on the agenda of every council. Years ago, I was impressed by the fact that a number of key companies around the country improved their environmental standards merely by putting concern for the environment on the agenda of every meeting of directors. Traffic reduction must be put on the agenda of local authorities.

My eighth and last principle is that we must not go down the route suggested by the hon. Member for Bath, which would make more work for bureaucrats. They may report to local councils every year, but that is not the stimulus we need. It is not the science that we need, and this is not the right Bill—although the hon. Gentleman has stimulated me and others to debate the matter. I happen to believe that this is the wrong Bill, and I am afraid that I am one of those who oppose it, but for the thought-out reasons that I have explained.

1.59 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North–East): It was very interesting listening to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). I had the pleasure of serving on the Committee dealing with the Bill, and I listened to his thoughts on this important subject at that time. The most ironic part of his speech today was when he talked about going out with a television crew. I thought to myself, "I bet they didn't go on a bus or a train." Sure enough, they ended up in a traffic jam.

That sums up everything one needs to say about the Bill. No one can disagree with it, because who does not want to see traffic reduced? But I have to say that, despite all the support it has received—and I am one of those who support it—it has the whiff of gesture politics. It contains a wish list of things we would like to see but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) made clear, we want other people to get out of their cars and go by train or bus so we can make our journeys more quickly. That is the heart of the difficulty with a Bill of this nature.

A fundamental point which came out following some of the representations we received was that although it is laudable to try to reduce traffic levels, it is the wrong target. A far more important target is the level of congestion. It does not matter if an extra car is on a road where traffic is flowing freely. Some people disagree with that, but many journeys made by car are economic and efficient—and some are far more efficient than journeys by public transport. I can give an illustration of this. Most journeys made outside peak transport times—particularly journeys made during the evening—across country or across towns are made by car.

Mr. Booth: Does my hon. Friend want us to go down the route towards the system used in Paris and other continental cities, which requires delivery lorries to deliver during the hours of nightfall?

Mr. Congdon: My hon. Friend makes an important point. What causes the real problems in our cities and on our roads? Traffic volume causes problems, but the crucial thing is people parking in bad positions. Many of the problems are caused by delivery lorries and vans parking near junctions or traffic lights to deliver during the day. There are difficulties in taking that too far, because some people would not like heavy lorries in residential areas at night, but a balance must be struck.

That leads me to another important point. The emphasis should be more on improving the flow of traffic, hence reducing congestion, rather than on volume. I have lived in London all my life, and it is fair to say that London—particularly south London—has had little improvement to its road network. I am not arguing for massive new road building. I was opposed to the south London assessment studies, as the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin–Walker) and other Members would have been. We have had little in terms of simple junction improvements to significantly reduce congestion.

How often does one find when one drives that the traffic grinds to a halt either because a delivery lorry is parked on a junction, or because someone is wanting to turn right, thus preventing traffic from flowing? A lot more could be done to improve the capacity of the road system in a city such as London, without major new road building.

Some of the approaches of traffic plans and traffic managers in town halls slow up traffic and cause congestion. This is a delicate issue. In residential roads, it is right to want to slow up cars. On roads that are used by more traffic, the balance is too far the other way. Certainly, in my area of Croydon, there seems to be a fascination and obsession with putting "Keep Left" signs at every point down a road, which effectively create a barrier. It is dangerous, because buses have to weave in and out. Although it slows down the traffic, which one could say is a good objective, and aids safety, it affects the flow and increases congestion.

Let me turn again to the objective of the Bill: reducing the volume of road traffic. What I am not clear about, and it did not come out clearly in Committee, is how many of the people who support the Bill are thinking in terms of simply reducing the rate of growth in traffic, which is a laudable objective, and how many are unrealistically thinking that, somehow, we can reduce the absolute level of traffic.

That crucial point needs to be addressed because, as I said in my intervention, the big driver behind the growth in traffic is increased wealth. In that sense, it does not matter what local authorities put in these plans. If our economy achieves good levels of economic growth—2.5 per cent., 3 per cent., or let us say 3.5 per cent. even; I would love to see that, although some people might

[Mr. Congdon]

not—as sure as night follows day, there would be big increases in traffic volumes. Conversely, we may want an absolute reduction in the level of traffic.

Let us return to the economic climate of the 1960s and 1970s, when we did not achieve good economic performance. If we went back to the standard of living then, we would have much lower levels of traffic, as fewer people would have cars. I am sure that that cannot be the objective. People aspire to own cars and want to use them. The challenge is to ensure that we can somehow contain the negative sides of their impact.

Pollution is an important issue and is linked to that of volume. I support the Government's determination to reduce the level of pollution from transport, but again I find it ironic that, when I drive to the House, most of the time at such odd hours—it is not quite so bad on a Friday—the worst pollution seems to come from lorries and buses. I am repeatedly told that public transport is marvellous and clean. It would be a brave person who would say that buses are clean. They seem to spew out filth from their diesel engines. I have a real concern about that.

Pollution is a problem and it is a legitimising factor behind the Bill. I readily concede that, because, as I have said, anything that can be done to help to restrain the rate of growth in traffic is useful, but I suspect that far more significant changes in reducing pollution will come when we get an alternative to the internal combustion engine, which surely as a society we are going to have to have. I do not want to turn the clock back, with all of us going around on horses and carts and never being able to visit people. We travel around because we want to do things.

Mr. Booth: I am grateful to be allowed to intervene a second time on my hon. Friend. Does he agree that, in Victorian times, people bemoaned the fact that the congestion of the horse and cart and of carriage transport was terrible? Apparently, the stench from the manure from the horses was so noxious that a number of legal actions took place over that at the time

Mr. Congdon: My hon. Friend makes a timely intervention to remind us that, back in those times, there was severe congestion from the horse-drawn transport, but, perhaps even more significantly, there was a somewhat different and perhaps more devastating pollution problem. At that time, forecasts were made, presumably by the predecessors of the Department of Transport—I do not know what it called itself in those days; perhaps the Department of the horse or something like that—that manure would be piled high to first-floor level. That never happened.

It is interesting to note that although congestion is bad, it will find its own level, in that it has to end when people cannot travel anywhere. The transport challenge is to have alternatives to the car so that people can move about their cities when they need to. I am happy to support the Bill, but with the reservation that it may not achieve its objective.

2.9 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) has given my views on the Bill's principles and outlined the important changes that were made in Committee. That relieves me of the task of repeating them. I shall deal briefly with some of the issues that hon. Members have raised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) spoke about the fallacy into which the House often falls of believing that legislation can change the world, and always for the better. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North–East (Mr. Congdon) spoke about the danger of creating a wish list or of indulging in gesture politics. I had such fears about the notion of starting with the imposition of national targets. That would be gesture politics, because we do not have the policy levers to deliver such targets nationally.

Focusing on local targets and on practical local measures to achieve them makes the legislation practical. The Bill does not engage in gesture politics, but suggests practical ways to resolve problems at local level. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester cited some practical measures that have already been taken by public transport operators to increase the use of public transport by making it more convenient and accessible. Local authorities that follow the Bill and the guidance that will be issued under it will support such measures in co-operation with public transport operators, whether they are train or bus companies or both working together.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester emphasised the importance of wide consultation. That is vital. If practical results are to be delivered, there must be local consensus on what is needed, what the targets should be and what is needed to achieve them. I have no difficulty whatever in joining the hon. Member for Bath in agreeing with my hon. Friend that parish councils should be included in such consultations. They should also include the business community, schools, hospitals, substantial organisations and groups of residents. They all need to be on board if the right solution to local problems is to be identified.

The Bill, as amended, recognises that some developments will generate traffic and that the effects will not automatically be deleterious. That is why the Bill requires authorities to identify the need to set targets and, in reply to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East, introduce practical measures that can deliver them. Hon. Members have spoken about the British Road Federation and the Confederation of British Industry. Coincidentally, I am shortly to meet representatives of both bodies.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester that the Bill is not a quick fix but a well-thought-out, longer-term strategy for striking a balance between our desire to protect the environment in which we live and which we enjoy, while ensuring that our mobility needs, personally or in the course of our economic activities, are met. We must not fall victim to stifling congestion. The Bill is not anti-car. As I said on Second Reading, if we fail to tackle the problems of congestion, that will not benefit those who need to use cars or business vehicles. Nor is this an anti-bypass measure. If traffic can be taken away from a town or village where it is inflicting a poor-quality environment and routed elsewhere without generating more traffic, that would not be contrary to the objectives of reducing traffic or traffic growth, and would be an environmental enhancement.

The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) referred to the importance of sustainability and to the safer routes to school initiative which many local authorities are promoting. We need to consider safer cycle routes. When I was in Plymouth recently, I saw new cycle routes alongside major roads, and a new type of crossing called a toucan, which is not just for pedestrians but for cyclists.

Yesterday, I was in Taunton and travelled on a gas-powered bus to Bristol. The use of alternative fuels with lower emissions, particularly for public transport vehicles, is one way in which we can achieve some of our environmental objectives. At Bristol Temple Meads station, I presented a special ticket to the 10,000th Great Western passenger who had made use of its new facility to buy a bus ticket while on the train. Virgin Rail is another company introducing advance taxi bookings from the train. It is trying to make a public transport journey as seamless as a car journey where somebody walks out of the front door and stays in the car until he or she reaches the office or another destination.

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth), in a thoughtful but brief speech, set out certain principles that he thought important. I did not note all eight of them, but I certainly agree that freedom of choice is very important. By improving the quality of public transport provision, we will extend the real choice that people have. I do not believe that many people make a conscious choice to get into a car and sit in a traffic jam. Many of them choose the car because they see no alternative.

My hon. Friend also stressed the importance of improving interchanges between different transport modes. We are seeing many good examples from private rail and bus operators, often in co-operation with enlightened local authorities that provide such facilities. My hon. Friend also made the point about the need to spread knowledge of best practice. Where there are good initiatives in some areas, that knowledge needs to be spread widely so that the same solutions can be applied elsewhere.

I endorse entirely my hon. Friend's suggestion that we need to make better use of science, and apply technology more imaginatively. He said that he believed that it was sensible to put environmental issues on the agenda. That is what the Bill will do. It will require every traffic authority to consider the level of traffic in its area, its future trends and what needs to be done about it. He also made the point that we should not just generate more work for bureaucrats. Amending the Bill so that in England we can set targets in guidance that would be part of the annual transport policies and programme round is one way in which we can ensure that we achieve those beneficial objectives without imposing new and unnecessary burdens on local authorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North-East referred to the impact of ill-thought-out and inconsiderate parking, and the need for smaller measures to improve traffic flow on our urban roads. I agree that, in implementing traffic management and calming measures, the devil is often in the detail. One cannot simply take a particular engineering feature out of a design patent book and stick it down anywhere and expect it to work. It is often in the detail that the problems arise. That is why local consultation is vital if such measures are to be effective.

The Bill suggests targets to reduce not just the absolute level of traffic—that may be possible in some circumstances—but to reduce traffic growth. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East also said that there is, apparently, an inexorable link between growth of traffic and gross domestic product. We do not know which way round that relationship works, but he will be interested to know that our expert advisory committee, the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessments, has been given the remit to study that relationship. We await its findings with great interest.

I have given a brief response, but necessarily so. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

AMENDMENT OF PRINCIPAL ACT

2.21 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 11, after 'company', insert

'other than small and medium–sized companies as defined in section 247'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 4, in page 2, line 8, after 'company', insert

'other than a small or medium–sized company as defined in section 247'.

Mr. Smith: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on his foresight in introducing the Bill. There is no doubt that British industry and the public sector face a major problem, a problem that may seem to some people to be some way off, since the millennium is nearly three years away. However, anyone who takes the trouble to study that problem will find that the solution may take longer than three years.

My hon. Friend, almost single-handedly in the House, has made a huge effort to draw the scale of the problem to the attention of industry, commerce and the Government. As a result, the United Kingdom is now rather better prepared than some other European countries; it is perhaps more on a par with the United States, which is certainly taking the problem seriously.

I entirely understand why my hon. Friend introduced the Bill. He wants every company in the country to take the problem seriously, and he wants it to be considered at the top level. He wants company directors to consider the scale of the problem, to produce an assessment and then to produce some kind of strategic solution. I endorse that approach. Every organisation that depends to any extent on information technology for the operation of its business has a great deal at stake—perhaps more than many people appreciate. It is not just the relevant business that might be at risk; business A could be brought to its knees by the failure of business B, its supplier, to tackle the problem effectively.

I was impressed by the note on the subject produced by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology in December. It listed some examples of what could happen. I will not trouble the House with all of them, but the document stated:

"In 1992, Mary Bendar of Winona . . . USA was invited to join a kindergarten class because she was born in '88 (she was 104 years old)."

when she received that invitation. That is just one example of what can happen, but there are many more. The problem will affect every business and everyone who has a personal computer, because a great deal of that software is already out of date.

I accept the premise on which the Bill is based; therefore, it is a matter of regret that I must tell my hon. Friend that, although I understand that he has introduced the Bill to give more prominence yet to the extent of the problem, I cannot support the Bill. I am not happy about placing more burdens on companies, as the Bill proposes. The amendments go some way towards meeting that difficulty by excluding small and medium companies from the Bill's ambit. My hon. Friend may say that that would exclude the vast majority of companies—I recognise that, but I am concerned about placing extra burdens on business. My hon. Friend wants to place a formal requirement on companies to undertake a formal assessment and publish the details in their directors' report.

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): My hon. Friend seeks to exclude the small and medium businesses from the scope of the Bill. He has made the point that it is important that those businesses that are connected to larger businesses through their computer systems should also be millennium-compliant. In doing so, he has already responded to the point that he now makes in order to try to convince the House to support his amendment. It is necessary to include in the Bill all businesses with computer systems that will be subject to problems at the millennium. To exclude the vast majority of them would negate the Bill's purpose.

Mr. Smith: I said that I was not very enthusiastic about the whole Bill, but if we are to impose extra regulations on business, those best placed to cope with them will be large organisations. I believe that large companies are starting to take the problem seriously and, if they were required to comply with the terms of my hon. Friend's Bill, there would be a trickle-down effect. They would place in their contracts with suppliers—large, medium and small—conditions requiring them to be millennium-compliant.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Why did the hon. Gentleman not join us in Committee on Wednesday morning when he would have heard the Minister warn us against being stuck in an aeroplane or on the 20th floor of a building on new year's morning in 2000? There is a powerful argument for the Bill.

Mr. Smith: I fully understand that. I also understand that a car might not start on the morning of 1 January 2000. But I am not happy about using the law to impose a solution on business. I have already said that I fully understand and support my hon. Friend's objectives, but I am not convinced that the Bill is the right way to go about achieving them. That is why I tabled my amendment.

The Minister for Science and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): I should like to add to the praise that my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) gave my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) for his work. He has focused the minds of the public and the professionals on the problem.

In a nutshell, the problem is that a computer system that has built into its programme the use of only two digits for the year—this year would be 97—may fail to recognise what is happening when the two digits are double O. At that time, the computer may think through

the date as 1900 or it may decide to pick any date at random—perhaps the date when the software programme was first applied—or it may shut down. As there is more than one solution, the difficulty is that the company with the computing system may not know what the reaction will be and it will need to go through each of its computing systems, line by line, to eradicate the problem. In addition, the company may have to work with every other company with which it trades around the world to ensure that they have carried out the same exercise.

This is what we call the millennium meltdown. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East raised the subject in the House and discussed it with me about 18 months ago—he and I have often been lone voices in the House. Much as I accept the motives of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield, the amendment, which would exclude small companies, is a difficult one to accept.

As I said in Committee, the difficulty with the legislation is that I do not want now—with only a short time to go until 2000—to focus people's minds on legalities, the accounting profession and attempts to follow set procedures. The attention of those people, from the chief executive down, should be focused on sorting out the problem.

Different companies will have different problems. A company that uses its computers merely for word processing can correct the problem as it emerges, but a company that has hugely complex systems, such as those used for trading, will have great difficulty. Morgan Stanley has told me that it has earmarked $55 million and taken on 200 staff to deal with this issue. The difficulty will get worse as we get closer to 2000, for the simple reason that more companies will refuse to trade with companies that cannot guarantee that their own systems are millennium-compliant. The Government have said that their systems will be millennium-compliant by December 1998, and that will clearly have implications for trading and exchanging information with non-compliant systems thereafter.

The difficulties will apply equally to embedded systems, such as those in lifts, aircraft, safety control devices—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Monday 10 March.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

BRITISH NATIONALITY (HONG KONG) BILL
[*LORDS*]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Order for Third reading Read.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

RESIDENTIAL HOMES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Not moved.

ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

LICENSING (REFORM) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

SALE OF MEDICINES (YOUNG PEOPLE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

BULL BARS (PROHIBITION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

REGULATION OF DIET INDUSTRY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

AIRPORTS AND AERODROMES (NOISE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

HOLOCAUST DENIAL BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

ABORTION (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

EDUCATION (SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS) BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I shall take points of order afterwards.

Second Reading deferred till Monday 3 March.

TOWN CENTRES (INSURANCE AND RESTORATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

ADOPTIVE MOTHERS (MATERNITY LEAVE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Monday 3 March.

DANGEROUS DOGS (AMENDMENT) BILL [*LORDS*]

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

DIGNITY AT WORK BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

DISABLED PERSONS AND CARERS (SHORT-TERM BREAKS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Monday 3 March.

WASTE PREVENTION BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

VICTIMS OF CRIME BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

RIGHT TO WORK BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

SCHOOL INTRUDERS (CRIMINAL OFFENCE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

SUNDAYS (DANCING AND LICENSING) BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Monday 3 March.

POLICE (INSURANCE OF VOLUNTARY ASSISTANTS) BILL [*LORDS*]

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

GREAT APES (PROHIBITION OF EXPERIMENTS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Monday 3 March.

DARTFORD–THURROCK CROSSING (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (AMENDMENT) (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

Mr. Alfred Morris: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not grossly demeaning of this honourable House that we are open to the accusation of ignoring even as worthy a Bill as the one to help severely handicapped children, by a Government Whip—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not for the Chair to comment.

Mr. Morris: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Nothing could be further to that point of order.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents), the Speaker shall—

(1) at the sitting on Monday 3rd March, put the Questions on the Motions in the names of Mr. Secretary Howard relating to the draft Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order 1997 and Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew relating to the draft Local Elections (Variations of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 not later than one and a half hours after the start of proceedings on the first such Motion; and these Motions may be proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock;

(2) at the sitting on Tuesday 4th March, put the Questions on the four Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Forsyth relating to Local Government Finance (Scotland) not later than Seven o'clock; and

(3) at the sitting on Wednesday 5th March—

(i) put the Question on the Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Howard relating to Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism not later than Seven o'clock; and

(ii) put the Question on the Motion in the name of Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew relating to the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 not later than Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Libya and Iraq

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

2.34 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In 1993, with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), I visited Iraq; we did so at our own expense. The sanctions were cruel and counter-productive, but, as my hon. Friends the Members for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) and for Woolwich (Mr. Austin–Walker) will discuss Iraq, I shall discuss Libya, not simply because of the grave injuries to the families who lost their loved ones eight long years and two months ago, but on account of the on-going damage to British industry and our relations with the Arab world and Africa.

I do not exaggerate. I quote from Nelson Mandela's letter to the Prime Minister:

"I understand that Colonel Qhaddafy is prepared to allow the individuals to be tried in Europe or elsewhere and much as I respect the integrity of your courts, I wondered whether you would not give consideration to such an alternative arrangement. In making this approach, I am conscious of the policy of your Government which you previous explained to me, but do so in the interest not only of Libya but of the continent, the Muslim world and international reconciliation."

The Prime Minister wrote to me on 30 May 1995:

"I will of course be replying to your question about my correspondence with Nelson Mandela, but I am afraid I will not be agreeing to place it in the Library".

This is the ninth Adjournment debate that we have had on this subject, but it takes place in very different circumstances from those of all previous debates, because something has happened; that something is that James T. Thurman, called often Tom Thurman, who was pivotal to the whole of the Government's case on Lockerbie, has been assigned to other roles for having fabricated forensic evidence.

I ask the Minister—I warned him that I would do so—what reports the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has received from the United States of the judgment that has been made on Thurman, because he is the man who, on 15 June 1990, claimed identification of the crucial timing device. He is the man who, with Williams, interrogated Narwhan Khreesat, and I am told that, at that crucial interview, the Scottish police were not welcome, and were excluded.

For 34 years, I have dealt with and known Lord Advocates. I have high regard for Crown agents, but I must say to the Crown Office, as the longest serving Scottish Member of Parliament, that I do not believe that they now have the evidence, which they claim to have, to conduct a successful court case. Indeed, I believe that the last thing they want is a trial, either in Edinburgh or in The Hague, because the professor of Scots law at the university of Edinburgh and many others in legal Edinburgh—including Peter Anderson, the lawyer of Simpson Marwick, who has been much involved—believe that any Scottish judge would throw out the case within hours, on the grounds that there was no case to answer.

Nothing better illustrates the weakness of Washington's case against Libya than its cynical misuse of the law to destroy the character and reputation of anyone who dares

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

to challenge its position on Lockerbie. Juval Aviv, the investigator for Pan Am until his report implicating the CIA was leaked to the press, was immediately subjected to a relentless campaign of harassment and vilification by the FBI. For five years, a squad of agents spent thousands of man hours raking through his affairs for something that might discredit him.

Charged last summer with faking a report to GEC in 1991—much to the surprise of GEC, which had not complained—Aviv was arrested by the FBI in a blaze of publicity designed to show that he was in the habit of producing fraudulent reports. The case against him was so obviously contrived, however, that a federal jury summarily threw it out. Concurring with the verdict, the judge observed that the charges had plainly been brought for another purpose—the inference, in his view, being that they were connected with Aviv's Lockerbie report.

Aviv has written to the Crown Office. I warned the Minister that I would ask whether the Crown Office is minded to apologise to Aviv; otherwise, it will find itself involved in a court case.

Still more scandalous has been Washington's systematic persecution of Lester Coleman III, the former American intelligence agent who publicly linked the Lockerbie disaster with the activities of the Drug Enforcement Agency in the middle east. Facing a similar trumped-up charge and a volley of death threats against himself and his family, Coleman sought asylum in Sweden, where he collaborated on a book, "Trail of the Octopus", with Don Goddard, in which he described what he had seen while stationed in Cyprus and mentioning its relevance to the Lockerbie inquiry.

On the eve of the book's publication, Coleman was indicted in New York on charges of perjury based on a sworn statement that he had made some years earlier in a civil suit by Pan Am against the United States Government. Clearly intended to deter the publishers from bringing out the book, the charges were not only as flimsy as those levelled against Aviv but entirely without precedent in United States' law.

Last October, unwilling to expose his wife and young family any longer to the rigours of life on the run, Coleman decided to return to the United States and clear his name, confident that the indictment would never stand up in court. Today, however, it begins to look as though that the charges against him will never be put to the test.

Although he was clearly subject to some risk, Coleman returned home voluntarily to stand trial. As a perjurer in a civil matter, he is hardly a threat to the community, yet bail was set at such an impossibly high level that he was left literally to rot in a federal detention centre.

In January, Coleman was diagnosed as suffering from cancer and had a malignant lump surgically removed from his left shoulder. He was sent back to prison in shackles and handcuffs with a supply of dressings, which he was left to change for himself. Inevitably, without proper treatment, he would have become grossly infected, and only the most strenuous effort on behalf of his volunteer defence attorney succeeded in getting him transferred to the prison wing of a New York public hospital, thereby almost certainly saving his life.

By returning unexpectedly to face the music, Coleman has placed his accusers in a serious quandary. To prove its case against him, Washington will be obliged to open its Lockerbie and intelligence files, which it has strenuously resisted doing for the past eight years on the grounds of national security. As it is unlikely to change its mind now, its only alternative in the long run is to drop the charges, although that would be tantamount to admitting that they should never have been brought in the first place.

Faced with that unpalatable choice, it would seem that the Justice Department has elected to confine Coleman indefinitely in conditions that would disgrace a banana republic, in the hope that his declining health will eventually spare Washington the choice of taking either course.

Coupled with the fragility of its forensic evidence, that ruthless campaign by the FBI to destroy any witness who might seriously challenge the Anglo-American position on Lockerbie serves to call the entire case against Libya into question.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I understand that those hon. Members standing have the permission of the hon. Member whose debate it is, but do they have the Minister's permission to speak?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): If they are brief, yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Harry Cohen.

2.45 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I am grateful to both the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), whom I congratulate on getting this Adjournment debate. He will know that I tried for my own debate on Iraq.

Mr. Phillipe Heffinck, UNICEF's representative in Iraq, said:

"4,500 children under the age of five are dying every month from hunger and disease".

That is deeply shocking.

Three days after my parliamentary questions in December, the "oil for food" ban was lifted, but the main sanctions regime continues.

I pay tribute to UNICEF for its relief operations. In a briefing, UNICEF's UK committee says that there is a "great need countrywide" in Iraq. It goes on:

"The health and nutrition situation remains critical.

Deteriorating living standards coupled with lack of immunity to the diphtheria toxin, in a large spread of the population over the age of five, are likely to result in a spread of the disease.

Hospitals suffer from lack of disinfectants, in addition to the shortage of essential drugs and blankets needed for the cold winter.

Deterioration in the quality of drinking water"—

which UNICEF describes as "critical"—

"has resulted in an increase of diseases such as typhoid and hepatitis."

UNICEF says that 6,900 severely malnourished children under the age of five were admitted to its 14 nutrition rehabilitation centres in the space of just one month, and that that is exacerbated by high food prices. In 1995, UNICEF adopted an "anti-war agenda",

which insists on protecting the rights of children from the impact of wars, and demands that every effort be made to minimise the conflict's impact on the young. That is plainly not happening in Iraq.

On 19 December 1996, Mr. Shevlin, managing director of Sterling Fluid Systems Ltd. of Reading, wrote to me:

"We have recently visited Baghdad and were shocked to see the impact that the UN sanctions are having. The lack of food and basic medicines are hurting the citizens of Baghdad. Those in power appear somewhat protected. I was left with the impression of those who are least able to influence events are suffering most."

It is shocking that the west has used the blunt sanctions weapon, with its consequences on children and the vulnerable. Other measures could have been put in place, such as suspending air links and foreign travel or freezing overseas bank accounts, targeted at the regime and the ruling elite rather than the citizenry and children. The effect of the sanctions has been barbarous.

Last week, the *New Statesman* referred to Madeleine Albright's campaign for the US Secretary of State's job. She responded on American television to a question about the sanctions-related deaths of 500,000 Iraqi children by saying:

"We think the price is worth it."

That is what she said about the death of half a million children. It is revolting thinking which should not be embraced by our Government.

It is time—indeed, it is long overdue—to lift those cruel sanctions.

2.48 pm

Mr. John Austin–Walker (Woolwich): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and the Minister for allowing me to make a brief intervention.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), I want to speak about Iraq, but may I first add one comment to what my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow said about the possibility of trial in a third country for those accused of the Lockerbie bombing? Although I agree with all the points that President Mandela made in his letter to the Prime Minister, there is another argument for holding a trial in a third country at the earliest opportunity: the interests of the families of the victims of Lockerbie.

I shall speak on the situation in Iraq on the same lines as my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton. I received a letter only this week from a constituent, Mrs. Laura Ann Sawyer, whose family has had a long association with Iraq and whose father was involved many years ago with the design and building of the bridge at Basra. Her teenage son has been staying for the past 18 months in Iraq with his grandparents, and became ill while he was there. That has brought home to his family in Thamesmead the implications of the sanctions.

In her letter, my constituent points to the lack of drugs, medical supplies and equipment, which she says is unforgivable. She states that that

"is hurting not the government but the person in the street. It is nearly seven years since the finish of the gulf war, and the people are still being penalised for it".

She adds:

"To my mind my son has had to suffer purely for political reasons, purely for the United Nations and the Western world to appear as the saviours keeping down the arch enemy Iraq. Just spare a thought for the likes of my son and the thousands of children who have suffered and died within Iraq—can you imagine what it has been like in the hospitals trying to treat desperately ill or malnourished children caused by the blockade, without adequate medical facilities and medicines?"

My constituent cites the facts that have been enunciated by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton about the number of children who have died. Mrs. Sawyer calls that the "massacre of the innocents". She asks in her letter—I put this point to the Minister—

"how many countries are there in the world where the leadership is not only doubtful but tyrannical and corrupt, have they sanctions imposed on them? How many military dictatorships and juntas are there in the world where the high street travel companies send out package holiday makers to their shores?"

I can tell the Minister one such country: Turkey. I have been to Turkey, to Diyarbakir and to south-east Turkey. I have seen the destruction of the villages and the massacre of the Kurdish population. There is nothing that Saddam Hussein has done against his Kurdish population that has not been done by the Turkish Government against their Kurdish population. Why do we have sanctions against Iraq, but supply the arms to Turkey to persecute its Kurdish population?

Let us have an end to the hypocrisy, and let us stop the massacre of the innocents in Iraq.

2.51 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on securing the Adjournment debate—his 10th on the same subject, I believe. He asked whether sanctions against Libya are justified, in view of the doubts that he expressed about Libyan responsibility for Lockerbie.

I am grateful to the hon. Members for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) and for Woolwich (Mr. Austin–Walker) for their contributions. I shall try to respond in the time available.

What are the hon. Gentleman's doubts? Do they really undermine the position that has been taken consistently by the Government since my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate issued the petition warrants against two alleged Libyan intelligence officers on 14 November 1991?

I begin by reminding the House that those warrants were issued after the biggest criminal investigation in British history. Two hundred and seventy innocent people from 22 countries died at Lockerbie. The evidence was gathered painstakingly by investigators from the Dumfries and Galloway constabulary and the United States. It led the prosecuting authorities in Scotland and the US to conclude that there were charges to be answered before a Scottish or US court.

It is not the job of the Government to prejudge the outcome of any trial, so I will not be drawn into making assumptions about whether the evidence will be enough to secure a guilty verdict. In order not to prejudice the outcome of any trial, I shall not make any comment of substance on the evidence. I am reassured that three successive Lord Advocates, who have had access to the evidence against the accused Libyans, concluded that the evidence justified, and continues to justify, the proceedings against them. It remains the Government's position that the accused Libyans should stand trial in Scotland or the US.

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

The hon. Member for Linlithgow mentioned Mr. Thurman, an FBI forensic scientist. The Prime Minister told the House on 20 February that the charges against the accused Libyans did not depend on any evidence that Mr. Thurman might give.

The United States authorities have told us that the FBI has transferred Mr. Thurman to other duties while the activities of the FBI laboratory are investigated by the Department of Justice's Inspector General. His report is yet to be published. There is nothing to suggest that it will reflect in any way on the Lockerbie case, but, if anything relevant emerges from it, I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will evaluate the implications most carefully.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of the acquittal of Juval Aviv on charges relating to an allegedly fabricated security survey. I refer hon. Members to the answer given in the *Official Report* of 27 January 1997, column 70, and add that the Crown Office statement released in relation to the Maltese double cross in May 1995 did no more than set out certain matters of public record as they existed at the time.

In the meantime, the hon. Gentleman asks whether we are right to maintain United Nations sanctions against the Libyan Government. The answer is unequivocally yes. The petition warrants in respect of the two accused assert that the accused, while acting as Libyan Government intelligence officers, conspired to blow up a civil airliner, and caused the Lockerbie bomb to be placed on PA103.

It is entirely correct that the Government should look to the Libyan Government to assist with the investigation—in particular, to arrange for the two accused to be made available for trial in Scotland or the United States, and to pay appropriate compensation. Sanctions were imposed by the international community in 1992 and 1993 as a mark of its condemnation of Libya's failure to co-operate with the United Kingdom, United States and French authorities over Lockerbie, and the murderous bombing, allegedly also by Libyans, of a UTA aircraft in September 1989.

Libya's record of state sponsorship of terrorism is, rightly, a matter of deep and abiding concern. I freely acknowledge that Libya has provided some answers to our questions about its help to the Provisional IRA in the 1970s and 1980s. Libya at least offered France some belated assistance over the UTA bombing when it allowed the French examining magistrate, Judge Bruguière, to visit Libya last summer—and not before time. As a result of his investigations, the judge issued two further warrants against Libyan intelligence officers, bringing to a total of six the Libyan officials accused in connection with the UTA bombing. The French authorities have yet to declare their satisfaction with the Libyan co-operation.

I also remind the House that, in October 1996, the German authorities issued arrest warrants against four former Libyan intelligence officers in the case of the bombing of the La Belle discotheque in Berlin in 1986, in which two people were killed and many were seriously injured.

Where will this sordid catalogue of Libyan involvement in acts of state-sponsored terrorism end? The Libyan Government have a lot to answer for—not least a huge stockpile of arms and explosives, including Semtex, that is still being used by the Provisional IRA. The only reasonable conclusion is that the pressure of UN sanctions must remain for as long as Libya continues to defy the will of the international community.

I do not welcome our highly unsatisfactory stand-off with Libya, but it is not of our making. Let me explain why the current Libyan campaign to persuade observers of its good intentions concerning trial in a third country is actually a smokescreen for continued Libyan intransigence, and why it would be wrong for people of good will to be taken in by Libyan so-called offers to hold the Lockerbie trial in a third country.

Accepting a trial in a third country would mean that we had bowed to the demands of suspected terrorists over the location and nature of the court that tried them. It would also imply that we accepted the argument that the accused would not get a fair trial in Scotland. The Security Council determined that the trial should be held in Scotland or the United States. Quite apart from our objections of principle to a trial outside Scotland or the US, there would be enormous practical and legal difficulties.

Frankly, we do not believe that the Libyans intend that any such trial should take place. They argue that they cannot force the accused to leave Libya for trial in Scotland or the US in the absence of an extradition agreement with either country. I ask what powers they would have to ensure their attendance if we were to set up the arrangements for a so-called "Scottish" trial in The Hague when there is no extradition agreement between Libya and the Netherlands?

I am conscious that my remarks will provide scant comfort to the relatives of the victims, and I am sorry about that. I assure them that we have looked hard for ways out of the current unsatisfactory solution, but so far we have been unable to identify a solution. We need a change of heart by the Libyan Government. If they are serious about wanting to rejoin the international community, they should surrender the two accused to a fair trial in Scotland or the United States.

As for opportunities for British firms, I share the concern of the hon. Member for Linlithgow if British firms are losing valuable export markets. I have received letters on the subject. I am sorry, too, if good friendships developed in better times with the Libyan people now seem to be stretched. The fault lies with the Libyan Government, not the Libyan people. Our difficulties go back even further than Lockerbie—to the murder on a London street of Woman Police Constable Fletcher in April 1984. We are not prepared to allow commercial considerations to compromise our position of principle on these two particularly sensitive issues.

Mr. Dalyell *rose—*

Mr. Hanley: I do not have time to allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene because of the contributions of his hon. Friends. I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon.

We should not forget why the United Nations applied sanctions. Following Iraq's illegal occupation of Kuwait in August 1990, the UN imposed measures to ensure Iraq's full compliance with the terms of the relevant Security Council resolutions. That was necessary to secure compensation for Iraq's victims, to extract from

Iraq an account of the fate of those Kuwaitis and others missing since the occupation, and to ensure that Iraq would not again pose a threat to regional security.

The need for full Iraqi compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions remains just as strong today. Saddam Hussein remains a threat to regional security and to his own people. There are articles in newspapers today about Iraq's chemical threat, even to European countries. I believe that Saddam Hussein's brutal attack on Irbil last August, by military forces including heavy artillery and tanks against civilian targets, was a clear violation of Security Council resolution 688, which demands an end to the regime's repression of the Iraqi people.

It is now six years since Iraq invaded Kuwait and UN sanctions were imposed against Iraq, yet Iraq remains far from compliance with its obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions. Of particular concern are Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Before the Gulf war, Iraq possessed enough chemical and biological weapons to destroy the world's population several times over. Saddam Hussein's continued desire to procure and produce these lethal weapons poses a serious threat to the region.

The UN special commission was established in 1991 to oversee the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass-destruction programmes. We strongly support its work, and we welcome Ambassador Rolf Ekeus to the United Kingdom. The commission has made good progress, despite Iraq's repeated attempts to obstruct and deceive it. We must remain vigilant. The special commission's chairman, Ambassador Ekeus, has warned that he does not have the full picture. I doubt that Iraq will ever tell the whole story while Saddam Hussein remains. The prospect of him retaining these horrific weapons does not bear thinking about. Until Iraq decides to comply fully with the demands of the Security Council's sanctions, they must remain.

I share hon. Members' concern about the humanitarian situation in Iraq. Sadly, Saddam Hussein does not share this concern. It is his failure to meet the UN's demands which prolongs the Iraqis' suffering. A relaxation of sanctions would not help the Iraqi people. Saddam Hussein does not care for them. Experience shows that, if he were allowed to renew uncontrolled exports of oil, he would use the revenue not for food and medicine but to rearm and threaten the region again.

I remind Opposition Members that food and medicines have never been subject to sanctions. We continue to support the efforts of the UN and non-governmental organisations in Iraq. Since April 1991, the United Kingdom has contributed over £92 million in aid, including last year £1.7 million on activities that directly benefit Iraqi children. I pay tribute to the work of the United Kingdom's NGOs in northern Iraq.

We have done much to help alleviate the Iraqi people's suffering. As I have said, we have provided over £90 million in aid since 1991, making us the second largest donor. We co-sponsored Security Council resolution 986, which allows Iraq to export $1 billion-worth of oil every 90 days, mainly for the purchase of humanitarian supplies. Saddam Hussein's failure to agree to its implementation for over 18 months has caused further unnecessary suffering to the Iraqi people.

I am delighted that the first consignment of humanitarian goods, purchased under Security Council resolution 986, is due to reach Iraq, possibly this weekend. That is good news for the Iraqi people. We want the benefit from Security Council resolution 986 to go to the Iraqi people, not the regime. The resolution contains safeguards to ensure that that happens. The UN has rightly insisted on implementing strictly the safeguards despite Iraqi attempts to undermine them. Each Iraqi should receive a significant increase in his—

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 3 March 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Heritage Sites

1. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to encourage more people to visit important heritage sites. [16695]

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): My Department, principally through the Historic Royal Palaces agency and English Heritage, is continually striving to develop its historic properties to make them more attractive and accessible to visitors.

Mr. Brazier: I welcome the England's Christian heritage programme of the Department, and I urge my hon. Friend to visit St. Augustine's abbey site in Canterbury, where much national lottery fund money is being invested in the 1,400th anniversary celebrations of St. Augustine's arrival in this country. I urge my hon. Friend to stress to his officials and to English Heritage the importance, when developing a monastery site, of showing its purpose and work, from prayer to alms giving and health care, rather than simply engaging in endless portrayals of dress, life style and so on.

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend kindly invites me to visit the museum at St. Augustine's abbey, which is to be opened on 25 May by the Archbishop of Canterbury. I should very much like to be present on that day, if that is possible. My hon. Friend asks me to make sure that the Christian element of cathedrals, churches and so on is well demonstrated. He makes an important point, which I shall draw to the attention of Sir Jocelyn Stevens.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Minister set up a Thames estuary initiative? There are numerous heritage sites on the estuary in Kent and in my county of Essex which are undervisited, although they are rich in our history and heritage, especially in relation to the defence of the United Kingdom. I refer especially to the two forts in Tilbury in my constituency, one of which is owned by English Heritage while the other is managed by the local authority. They would be greatly appreciated by many visitors, both from within the United Kingdom and from north America and Australia.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman takes an admirable interest in defence matters and defence heritage matters. I shall certainly look at the two places that he mentions; if he would like to talk to me about how we might best promote them, I shall gladly meet him.

Sport (Young People)

4. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action she is taking to encourage young people to participate in sport. [16698]

Mr. Sproat: The Government's sports policy document "Sport: Raising the Game", which was published in July 1995, sets out our strategy for encouraging young people to participate in sport. It particularly emphasises the importance of maximising sporting opportunities for young people within and outside formal education. Significant progress has been made in taking forward the various initiatives in the past year and a half. I made a detailed announcement of progress to the House on 14 February.

Mr. Robinson: I thank my hon. Friend for that welcome answer. We in Somerset were delighted when Huish Episcopi secondary school received a grant of nearly £50,000 for a national lottery multi-sports complex project, costing £80,000 in all. Is that not precisely the way forward, and does my hon. Friend agree that it will encourage young people in Somerset and beyond to pursue sport with excellence?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The award for a multi-game complex was welcome, and I hope that many other schools, local authorities and communities will take encouragement from the success of that application and apply. The Sports Council for England now has a £2 million bid fund to which schools and local sports clubs can apply to improve the links between local sports clubs and local schools.

Miss Hoey: Is the Minister aware of the crisis that is looming over the future of the Crystal Palace national sports centre? Is he also aware that, in relation to encouraging young people into sport, Crystal Palace has a two-pronged purpose? First, it is the only indoor training centre in London and, secondly, it is the only place in the whole of the south of England where we can have international and domestic competitions. Is he aware that there is a real worry about what has been happening to Crystal Palace and how that will affect the future of those schools that use it as a facility for pupils? The Minister should be spearheading the drive to find a way forward between Bromley council and the Sports Council.

Mr. Sproat: I am aware of that concern. It is an important issue. The Sports Council is looking this minute at how best to solve the problem so that that part of England does not lack the sort of facility that Crystal Palace provides.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Given the obstacles in the way of sports being developed in as many schools as we would like, does my hon. Friend agree that the connection between sports clubs and schools is crucial, and that fresh efforts should be made to persuade schools that they should link with local clubs to open up more opportunities for young people?

Mr. Sproat: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend, not least because one particular sport that we have in

common, cricket, is still played in only 50 per cent. of state schools in England—a poor percentage, which I wish to see increase. My hon. Friend should draw the attention of all the schools and local clubs in his area to the benefits of the lottery for such schemes, and in particular to the £2 million challenge fund that the Sports Council has for promoting links with local schools and local sports clubs.

Mr. Maxton: Does the Minister agree that the best way of encouraging young people to participate in sport is to allow as many of them as possible to watch those sports on television? Will he therefore take the opportunity to congratulate the Scottish Rugby Football Union and other rugby football unions, which have signed a long-term deal with the BBC for the benefit of the development of the sport, rather than for greed, so that matches will be shown to the widest possible audience? Is it not a matter of great regret, certainly to him and to me, that two years from now, when France meets England again at Twickenham, the match will be seen by only a small minority of the population?

Mr. Sproat: I am happy to congratulate the Scottish Rugby Football Union, not only on its decision, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but on the tremendous result on Saturday in the match against Ireland. I also congratulate the Irish and Welsh rugby football unions on a decision that showed that they had the interests of the sport at heart. None the less, I would not criticise the English Rugby Football Union for anything that it may do, because it is up to sport itself to decide what is best for sport.

Film Industry

5. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of the total earnings of the British film industry. [16699]

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): It is estimated that British films and co-productions earned £39 million at the United Kingdom box office and that UK film companies earned £495 million abroad in 1995. Now that British films and talent have won 30 nominations for the 1997 Oscars, the prospects for increased earnings are excellent.

Mr. Whittingdale: I thank my right hon. Friend for those extremely encouraging figures. Does she agree that the large number of academy award nominations received by "The English Patient" and "Secrets and Lies" is further evidence that the British film industry is going from strength to strength, and will she join me in wishing those films and all the other British contenders every success on Oscar night?

Mrs. Bottomley: Undoubtedly, the success to which my hon. Friend refers demonstrates the strength of the British film industry. Our studios are full, films are made here by companies from all around the world, audiences are up and investment is up. That is because we have an economy that is friendly to enterprise and to initiative and that allows people to keep the benefits of their success.

Mr. Wigley: The Secretary of State will be aware of the numerous film productions in Wales in recent years, including some exciting developments in recent weeks. Is she aware that, whereas in Scotland there is a Scottish film production fund, which helps to develop indigenous film producers and to extend the range of films that can be produced in Scotland, we do not have quite the same facility available in Wales? Will she examine that matter to maximise the benefit that this promising industry can bring to the economy?

Mrs. Bottomley: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, I have taken an extremely serious approach to the film industry. I established the Middleton committee, which made 11 recommendations. We have acted on eight of them. The Arts Council's recent initiative with the franchise is part of that overall strategy. I shall certainly speak with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales on the matters to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Sir Anthony Durant: My right hon. Friend will be well aware that the British film industry's production rate is at its highest for some time, with some 127 films going into production. Does she agree that the lottery money recently allocated to the industry will encourage it? What other steps is she taking to continue this success story?

Mrs. Bottomley: I particularly want to pay tribute to my hon. Friend for all that he has done to champion the film industry over the years. Last week, I was able to visit the British Film Commission at Berkhamsted to see its work and the archive, which has recently benefited from an additional £13 million of lottery money. We have been using a range of measures, which are set out in the Middleton report, to promote the industry further. We are now looking at the definition of a British film. Above all, what the industry needs is to be able to have the rewards of its endeavours, a flexible labour market and low non-wage labour costs. The Government's strategy, quite apart from the Department's initiatives, is delivering just that in Britain today.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the best British films of the past few months is "Brassed Off"? It is about a mining community where the pit has shut and the community has been destroyed as a result of the Tory Government and where the pit band is trying to find enough money to continue playing. Is it not pretty clear that a lot of people on the Wirral saw it, because they were brassed off last week?

Mrs. Bottomley: I much appreciate the hon. Gentleman making that point. One of the things that has given me most pleasure as Secretary of State for National Heritage has been meeting many of those involved in brass bands which are now receiving lottery awards. Indeed, there have been 91 awards for brass bands; the Easington colliery band, which was the first brass band I met when I became a Minister nine years ago, now has new instruments as a result of the lottery.

More significantly, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that many communities that faced great difficulties because of the loss of jobs in the mining industry now have more jobs in the new sectors, many of them related to the cultural sector and the major regeneration that has resulted from my Department's initiatives.

Lottery Grants (Charities)

6. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage to what extent the revised criteria for national lottery grants will support the work of British charities providing emergency medical relief in the developing world, with special reference to Merlin; and if she will make a statement. [16701]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Charities based in the United Kingdom and working overseas, including Merlin, were eligible to apply for a grant from the National Lottery Charities Board under its international grants programme. In framing the priorities and policies for the programme, the board consulted British charities and voluntary organisations working overseas. Their view was that funds would be best spent in supporting long-term development to help people to help themselves, rather than on emergency provision, for which there were other sources of funding.

Miss Lestor: In view of the declining aid budget, the effect of the lottery on small charities and the fact that the requirement to plan nine months in advance makes it difficult for organisations such as Merlin—which is, as the Secretary of State said, an emergency relief organisation—should not the criteria be changed to include, say, training for staff, the stockpiling of medicine and the provision of infrastructure? That would enable such organisations to qualify for lottery money, and exclude them from the nine-month criterion. Will the Secretary of State consider that proposal?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Lady will be aware that these precise decisions are matters for the charities board. I think that it will examine the £25 million of the first round to see what lessons can be learned, but I commend it on the fact that almost £500 million has been allocated in virtually 7,000 awards. I am pleased that some charities about which the hon. Lady is concerned have benefited. I believe that the Red Cross, for example, has had about 12 awards; Oxfam, too, has received an award, and I know that it hopes for a substantial award in the new round. I wish Merlin well and greatly respect its work.

Anglers

8. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of the number of anglers in the United Kingdom. [16703]

Mr. Sproat: The National Rivers Authority commissioned a national angling survey in 1994 which concluded that there were 3.3 million freshwater and sea anglers aged 12 and over in Great Britain.

Mr. Ainsworth: I thank the Minister for that reply. Given that angling is clearly the most popular participatory sport in the country, why did it receive a miserly £72,500 of development money from the Sports Council last year? Why was angling not even mentioned in its list of the top 22 sports? In the light of their appalling record, will the Government give a commitment to match Labour's commitment to oblige the Sports Council to give more assistance to angling for its administration needs?

Mr. Sproat: The amount that the Sports Council gives in grant to angling or any other sport is a matter for the Sports Council. However, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that £500,000 from the national lottery and £100,000 from sportsmatch have gone to angling. He will be further aware of the Government's record of improving river quality, ending the problems caused by saboteurs through the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and reviewing predatory bird and other measures, which shows our commitment to the popular sport of angling.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my hon. Friend accept that country sports in general, and angling in particular, are enjoyed by a wider cross-section and by more people than any other sport in the country? Does he agree that the last thing any of them want is Government interference?

Mr. Sproat: They quite like Government money from time to time. None the less, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the most pleasing aspects of the past few months has been that the three bodies representing game, coarse and sea angling have come together for the first time, and the Sports Council will be keen to help.

Mr. Pendry: Is the Minister aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North–East (Mr. Ainsworth) is absolutely right about the fact that anglers are furious with the Government for ignoring their legitimate claims to recognise angling as a major sport? Is it any wonder that the president of the National Federation of Anglers wrote to the Prime Minister to bemoan the fact that the Government had no policy on angling, in contrast with the Labour party, which has a clearly defined charter for angling? The NFA president concluded by stating the obvious—that anglers are coming to the view that Labour cares about angling but the Government do not. Will the Minister, at the very least, dissociate himself from those in his party who claim that Labour will ban angling after we win the general election? Furthermore, on behalf of the Government, will he match our firm commitment to the sport?

Mr. Sproat: In anticipation of some major exaggeration of the contents of Labour's so-called charter for angling, I reread its few pages this morning, and I was surprised by how little it said.

I mentioned earlier some measures that the Government have undertaken. We have also abolished non-domestic rates for angling riparian owners—a measure that was welcomed by the angling community. That underlines the fact that the Opposition are basically hostile to country sports, and that no angler who wants his sport to be maintained should be so foolish as to vote for the Labour party.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the worst threat facing angling is Labour's policy to give an unrestricted right of access to riverbanks, canal banks and lakesides, which would make the management of fisheries impossible and would destroy the opportunity for anglers to enjoy their sport quietly?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is right: the Labour party poses a serious threat to angling, and he has mentioned one aspect of that threat.

Plymouth Millennium Fund

9. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received in respect of the Plymouth millennium fund. [16704]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Millennium Commission, of which I am chairman, has received representations from the Port of Plymouth, the West Country tourist board, the Plymouth marketing bureau and five individuals on Plymouth 2000 Partnership's bid "Plymouth Waterfront—A Celebration of Discovery". The bid is still under consideration. The commission is always pleased to receive representations on a project, whether supportive or otherwise. Representations are one of the key criteria used in assessing applications for funding.

Mr. Jamieson: Does the Secretary of State accept that, because it reflects the area's maritime history, the Plymouth 2,000 millennium bid is most deserving? Will she ensure that it is considered in its entirety? Will she also clarify the purpose and role of individual commission members in trying to change individual bids?

Mrs. Bottomley: The commission is looking extremely sympathetically at Plymouth's proposals. Not only the hon. Gentleman but my hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth, Drake (Dame J. Fookes) and for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) have spoken at length to me about the proposals. Mayflower harbour, Plymouth and the Royal William yard, Plymouth are being considered in particular. I have also had discussions with Baroness Cumberlege, the sponsor Minister, who has been extremely helpful in relation to Plymouth's cause and concerns. Sutton harbour, Plymouth, the national marine aquarium and other projects have already received substantial funding, and I hope that the Millennium Commission can add to the £4.5 million of lottery money that is already being spent on 35 awards in the Plymouth area.

Individual commission members may have their own views and opinions, but they will simply refer those back to commission meetings, when matters are debated carefully by all the individuals concerned.

Tourism Grants

10. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will reintroduce section 4 grants for the tourism industry in England. [16707]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government have no plans to reintroduce section 4 grants in England. Tourism is a highly successful industry and is increasingly making use of many opportunities to benefit from public money. Those opportunities include challenge funding, the single regeneration budget and, in eligible areas, the European regional development fund. Moreover, the national lottery is playing a major role in financing exciting new capital projects, many of which help to encourage tourism and bring widespread benefits to communities across the country.

Mr. Waterson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, like me, many hoteliers and guest house owners in my constituency remain puzzled about why those grants are payable in other parts of the United Kingdom but not in England? Is she also aware that those same constituents very much welcome the fact that, under the National Heritage Bill, funding will now be available for great examples of our national heritage, such as Eastbourne pier?

Mrs. Bottomley: I know the concerns of my hon. Friend's constituents. If the Labour party had its way, there would of course be no coherence in what happens in the different parts of the United Kingdom, and I think that would be very much more alarming. I well recall the visit to Eastbourne pier, and the inconsistency of piers in private ownership being unable to benefit from lottery money, unlike those in charitable or local authority ownership. I am delighted to say that, last Thursday, the National Heritage Bill received Royal Assent. Therefore, my hon. Friend's pier, like other piers in the realm, will now have lottery assistance available when appropriate.

Mr. Pike: Does the Secretary of State realise that tourism is rapidly developing in industrial areas such as Lancashire and Yorkshire, and that section 4 and other grants to help the industry develop are very important for their employment prospects and for taking advantage of existing tourism facilities?

Mrs. Bottomley: Old Labour shows its face once again. Of course a cheque from the centre is always helpful to those who apply, but the Government believe that the reason why we have had the incredible boom in the tourism industry is that we keep taxation and regulation to the minimum. We have been able to boost the many national assets which are such an attraction for people around the world. There is no doubt, however, that well over £1 billion has gone from the national lottery to many massive regeneration projects, such as the Lowry centre and redevelopment of Newcastle's Sunderland glass centre. Across the United Kingdom, city centres are being restored. Only last week, a massive £140 million was awarded to museums, and the key awards were in Manchester. I think that everyone will agree on the awards' importance and significance for the tourism industry.

"Success Through Partnership"

11. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what responses she has received to her strategy document "Success through Partnership: A Strategy for Tourism". [16708]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: "Success through Partnership: A Strategy for Tourism", published on 5 February, has been extremely well received. It has received much positive press coverage and we have had many letters welcoming its overall comprehensive nature, its key targets and its specific points for action. Work on the action plan has already begun, both within my Department and elsewhere.

Mr. Coombs: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that 1995 was a record year for British tourism and that 1996 is likely to exceed that record when the figures are finally available? Does she agree that the proceeds

of the national lottery are making possible a massive increase in our tourism infrastructure, whether it is the new railway heritage museum in Swindon in my constituency or the new Tate gallery of modern art in the Bankside power station in London? In the context of the development of the south bank, can my right hon. Friend tell the House when we are likely to get a positive decision on the redevelopment of the south bank centre itself?

Mrs. Bottomley: I can confirm my hon. Friend's comments. We have reversed a 10-year decline in our world tourism share. In 1995, earnings from overseas tourism grew by 9 per cent. in France and by 15 per cent. in Spain and Italy. In the United Kingdom, there was 26 per cent. growth, with earnings now amounting to more than £22.5 billion. That is a formidable achievement and I anticipate that next year will be even better.

I also commend my hon. Friend's comments about investment in many heritage, arts and culture-related projects, such as those in Swindon in his constituency. We want to boost domestic tourism further. The south bank project is another major renaissance of the Thames initiative which will be of lasting value and which will lead up to the millennium year, when we shall see opportunities for our arts, our heritage and our cultural life as never before. Those behind the south bank project, like other applicants, must be sure that they have completed the necessary processes, paperwork and business plan before their applications can be properly considered.

Dr. John Cunningham: The right hon. Lady forgot to mention that the Government's policy document on tourism had to be withdrawn because it was full of spelling mistakes. It turned out that those who wrote it could not even spell "Prime Minister".

As there has been considerable reference to lottery funding, will the right hon. Lady explain why about 90 per cent. of lottery grants remain in the bank unspent? Is it not because the matching funding conditions are too onerous even for some of our major national institutions? Does that not mean that, in areas of less affluence, many people are being excluded altogether from successful applications because they have no chance of meeting the matching funding requirements?

Mrs. Bottomley: The Labour party is a great believer in preaching the need for homework to everybody. I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman does his own homework a little better. So far, partnership funding has been running at about £1.41 for every £1 necessary; in other words, partnership funding has exceeded expectations. In areas where difficulties may emerge, there is the flexibility for all the lottery distributors to vary the funding required. The Sports Council, for example, will provide 90 per cent. of funding, if necessary; the arts and heritage fund also has flexibility. If money is unspent so far, it accrues interest which then goes to the good cause.

I will investigate any matters concerned with the tourism strategy. I suspect, however, that the right hon. Gentleman's comments are just another fanciful fairy story invented by the Labour party.

Arts (Private Sector Sponsorship)

12. **Mr. Richards:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to encourage private sector sponsorship of the arts. [16709]

14. **Sir Wyn Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions she has held on promoting business support for the arts. [16711]

Mr. Sproat: The Government's national heritage arts sponsorship scheme, otherwise known as the pairing scheme, was established in 1984 to bring new sponsors into the arts. It continues to be a great success. To date, it has brought more than £115 million of new money into the arts and more than £37 million of awards matching more than £77 million of business sponsorship.

Mr. Richards: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that, although the North Wales music festival attracts widespread support from the private sector, it is continually looking for new sponsors? Will he join me in congratulating North Wales Blue Grass festival—[*Laughter.*] Opposition Members may laugh, but it is not a festival to celebrate the French victory over England at Twickenham on Saturday. Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating North Wales Blue Grass festival on attracting sponsorship from North Wales Independent Press?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, I shall certainly join my hon. Friend in doing that. This year in Wales there have been 39 awards totalling £125,000, leading to a total injection into artistic schemes of well over £250,000.

Mr. Barry Jones: Will the Minister of State accept a joint invitation to St. Asaph's cathedral, where the North Wales music festival takes place? If he does, he will discover that the cathedral's acoustics are perfect; many of our regional orchestras play there. How can he help the festival, which is in dire need of sponsorship?

Mr. Sproat: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind invitation to the festival. I am more than willing to take it up, given that he invited me to the Liverpool Philharmonic a couple of years ago and I greatly enjoyed myself. I shall gladly consider the hon. Gentleman's point about the shortage of funds to see whether I can give advice on how to find help.

Weekly Lottery Draws

13. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions she has had with the Office of the National Lottery regarding the introduction of additional weekly national lottery draws. [16710]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None.

Mr. Banks: That is a great pity; it shows just how out of touch the Secretary of State is with the way in which people feel about the second weekly draw. Camelot could have used separate numbers for the second weekly draw, but it deliberately chose not to do so. Some 50 per cent. of people who play the lottery use the same numbers, so they are automatically dragged into the lottery.

Camelot is now talking about a third weekly draw. When will the right hon. Lady get a grip on the matter? This is her last appearance as Secretary of State answering questions on national heritage, and all Opposition Members are very pleased about that, but she still has a few weeks left to get a grip on Peter Davis, the toothless Oflot watchdog, and to try to ensure that Camelot looks after the people who play the lottery, not itself.

Mrs. Bottomley: There is no question of the lottery being anything other than extremely carefully regulated. Parliament laid down the regulator's duties: he must protect players' interests, ensure propriety and ensure that the return goes to good causes. I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman's constituency has already benefited from 13 awards of more than £1 million. In his area of London, another nine awards for well over £1 million are providing regeneration and worthwhile activities and opportunities for the young. So far, there has been no evidence of excessive participation—the average household spends about £2.40 a week, which is much less than a packet of cigarettes. There will be no further activity if it might jeopardise the good name and effectiveness of our very successful national lottery.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I partly support the idea of using a different set of numbers for the mid-week game, but does my right hon. Friend get as brassed off as I do by the moaners and whingers on the Opposition Benches who can see no good in the national lottery? We have the most successful national lottery in the world; it has raised more than £1 billion for good causes, some of which involve small rural activities that have never received grants in the past. At one stage the Opposition wanted to cap the limit on prizes, but they changed their mind when they discovered how successful the national lottery was. Is it not about time that they started to spread the good word about the national lottery and stopped moaning and complaining about it?

Mrs. Bottomley: Good news is always bad news for the Labour party. Its attitude to the national lottery is an example of its endless meddling and tinkering. Labour Members could not bring themselves to support the national lottery on Second Reading.

Mr. Tony Banks: We did.

Mrs. Bottomley: No. They sat on the fence and abstained. What we are now hearing is a "united" Opposition who are only too keen to demonstrate that they all did different things—I believe that to be true, and I think that many others do too. They deeply resent Camelot because it makes a profit—they are hostile to success and want to penalise anybody who has made a profit. They said that they would cap the prizes, but now believe that that is unpopular. Most of their suggestions about the lottery look like applications for a Sports Council kite-flying prize. As for the rest of us, we thank goodness that the national lottery was introduced by this Government, that it was this Prime Minister's idea and that it is enormously benefiting the towns and cities of this country.

Mr. Maclennan: What action does the Secretary of State propose to take to deal with the legitimate concerns of the football pools industry about the impact of the mid-week draw on its fortunes and, in particular, on the Foundation for Sport and the Arts? Does she believe that she can save that valuable institution?

Mrs. Bottomley: I accept the difficulty that many of the pools organisations have had, and it is important to ensure that we can support the various initiatives that they were assisting. However, at a time when £441 million has already been spent on 2,603 awards for sports, we can see that sports in this country are benefiting as never before.

Sir Donald Thompson: Did my right hon. Friend hear any complaints about the national lottery when she visited my constituency a few Fridays ago, and met business women and some of the ladies and gentlemen who have benefited from the £2 million of lottery money and millennium money that my constituency has received in the past few years?

Mrs. Bottomley: I enormously enjoyed my visit to my hon. Friend's constituency. I was delighted to meet carers and the group from the nursery class. Last week, I was struck to learn that, apparently, 277 playgroups have already received lottery awards, and as the figures come through, it becomes progressively more exciting to see the difference that they make. Above all, I commend my hon. Friend's youth council. Last week, we launched our "Young people make a difference" strategy, which is intended to ensure that all young people who want to volunteer can do so. There is now up to £500 million available for youth volunteering initiatives, and I also announced up to 130 posts at volunteer bureaux with youth facilitators. I believe that that will make a lasting difference to our young people and our communities, which I know will be extremely welcome to all responsible citizens.

Dr. John Cunningham: Does the Secretary of State recognise that the football world will be deeply disappointed by her response in respect of the Football Trust? The trust's income has decreased by two thirds as a consequence of the huge success of the national lottery in raising funds; that in turn has prevented the essential safety work on football grounds that the public, fans and all those who love our national game want. Is it not clear that there are extenuating—indeed, very special—circumstances, and should she not join the Labour party in our commitment to make up that shortfall with money from the national lottery so that essential ground safety work can proceed?

Mrs. Bottomley: As ever, Labour Members look for a cloud over every silver lining—they are desperate to look for the downside. If ever anybody had any doubt about how Labour Members would treat the national lottery, they have heard this afternoon that there would be meddling, tinkering and interference. There have been 355 lottery awards for football—never has so much gone into sport and into football in particular. Those of us with slightly longer memories than the right hon. Gentleman will recall that Euro 96 was a spectacular success and that our stadiums are among the best in the world, which had a great deal to do with the Government and the steps that we took to ensure that.

Popular Music Industry

16. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the impact of the British popular music industry on (a) British cultural life and (b) tourism. [16713]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: British popular music makes an enormous contribution to the cultural life of the country. Domestic sales rose in 1996 to £1.08 billion, making ours the fourth largest music market in the world. Twenty per cent. of recordings sold worldwide contain a British element. British talent and technical expertise reach hundreds of millions of homes around the globe.

Mr. Fabricant: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does she recall that, in the 1970s, many rock and pop stars left the country because of punitive taxation? Is she delighted that, under the present Conservative Government, the Spice Girls have stayed in this country, and will she congratulate the Spice Girls on winning the best single award in the Brit awards? Was she heartened, as I was, to hear that Margaret Thatcher was the original Spice Girl?

Mrs. Bottomley: Yes.

Mr. Cunliffe: Will the right hon. Lady request the national lottery board to keep a better sense of proportion, fairness and, to some degree, equity? How can it reconcile giving £55 million to the royal opera house in London for wealthy pleasure-seekers while refusing substantial grants to the Marie Curie Cancer Care unit, which operates hospices for dying people? The board has given 277 times more in subsidies to the opera than in grants to hospices. How can we, as Christians, given the criteria that have been set, accept the encouragement of the growth of opera houses as against hospices?

Madam Speaker: That was a very interesting question, but it does not relate to the one that is on my Order Paper. Would the Minister like to make a response?

Mrs. Bottomley *rose—*

Madam Speaker: A generous lady.

Mrs. Bottomley: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was auditioning for next year's Brit awards, but I was going to respond anyway.

Although I have a great deal of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's point, I am pleased that £160 million has been spent on health-related charities; he knows how strongly I felt about that when I first became Secretary of State. However, I believe that he would miss the point if he failed to recognise what an incredible opportunity the national lottery has been for our country, enabling us to invest in our arts, heritage and cultural life.

Sir Ernest Hall, a member of the Arts Council, said:

"Through the Lottery we have an opportunity to do for our towns and cities what the enlightened patronage of the Papacy and the Medicis did for the cities of Italy. We can realise Blake's dream of making England, 'an envied storehouse of intellectual riches'."

I believe that it is a magnificent opportunity. As the Department reaches its fifth anniversary, it can see the way in which it has invested in the initiatives that matter to the people of this country.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid (Industrial Tribunals)

28. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received on extending legal aid to cases before industrial tribunals. [16725]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Gary Streeter): A number of representations on extending the scheme to cases before industrial tribunals and other tribunals were received by the Department in response to the Lord Chancellor's Green Paper on legal aid published in May 1995.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that such a course of action would merely burden the already overburdened legal aid fund, place additional burdens on industry and make job creation more difficult? Will he therefore comment on the interview in the *New Statesman* with Lord Irvine of Lairg?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend knows that our policy is to bring the legal aid budget under control—to bring an end to its demand-led, runaway nature before any thoughts of applying legal aid elsewhere can be entertained. I was therefore shocked to read the shadow Lord Chancellor's proposals to extend legal aid to industrial tribunals that appeared in the *New Statesman* in December. *[Interruption.]* I have it here and can read it if the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) wants me to.

Every year, 80,000 cases are heard by industrial tribunals. If only half of them were to attract £1,000 per case, that would add £40 million to the legal aid bill. Is it any wonder that the first act of any unlikely incoming Labour Government would be to have a summer Budget to pay for their massive spending plans?

Mr. Janner: Has the Minister considered what steps he could take to provide aid, legal or otherwise, for himself and his colleagues when they consider themselves unfairly dismissed by an ungrateful but fairly discerning electorate?

Mr. Streeter: We Conservatives believe in democracy. Although the hon. and learned Gentleman has served with distinction in the House, he has never been very good at predicting the future: he was wrong in 1992 and he is wrong today.

Legal Aid Reform

30. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he last met the chief executive of the Legal Aid Board to discuss reform of the legal aid system. [16727]

Mr. Streeter: I last met the chief executive of the Legal Aid Board on Wednesday 26 February 1997. We reviewed the White Paper reforms, which will cash-limit the budget, set national and regional priorities, dispense legal aid through block contracts with high-quality

providers, and tighten the means test to weed out undeserving cases. Good progress is being made, but some of these reforms require primary legislation.

In the meantime, we have reformed the way in which solicitors and barristers are paid, which gives us greater control and will reduce costs. We have set up a special investigations unit to crack down on bogus claims. That is already beginning to bear fruit. We have also introduced regulations to stop legal aid abuse by the apparently wealthy.

Mr. Robinson: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, as far as it goes, but I am sure that he is aware that many of my constituents read reports in the tabloid newspapers to the effect that large sums are being paid in legal aid to undeserving people who could well afford to pay. Are there any steps that he could take now to crack down on the abuse of legal aid?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is right to press me on this point. Although our reforms are right and positive results and savings from the measures that we have already taken are beginning to emerge, it remains clear that too many cases that should not get it are still receiving legal aid. Accordingly, my Department is now looking at two further areas in which I want to make more progress.

First, we shall review the use made by the Legal Aid Board of counsels' opinions. We shall explore ways of cracking down on over-optimistic opinions from barristers that lead to legal aid being granted when it should not be.

Secondly, it is increasingly obvious that many of the cases that cause widespread public concern are decisions by area committees reversing initial refusals by the Legal Aid Board. We shall explore ways of bringing area committees more into line with public concern and common sense.

Mr. Boateng: What action does the Minister propose to take to deal with the grotesque imbalance between public expenditure on civil legal aid for ordinary, hard-working, honest taxpayers, and on criminal legal aid for those who are convicted of crimes yet are required to pay nothing towards the cost of their defence? Is it not time to recognise the fact that, under the Labour Government, about 80 per cent. of households had access to civil justice, whereas under this Government that number has fallen to 49 per cent.? Is it not time to return access to the courts to the ordinary, hard-working British people?

Mr. Streeter: Once again the hon. Gentleman appears to be calling for a change in the rules that will enable more people to claim and more money to be spent by the Government. He is a big-spending member of the Labour party—I do not mean just his suits. He does not seem to realise that the Government cannot spend money that they do not have. If we are to spend more, we must tax more. This is old Labour in a new suit: tax and spend.

Legal Aid Costs

31. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the per capita cost of the legal aid programme relative to those for similar programmes in other EU member states. [16728]

Mr. Streeter: None, but it is widely believed that our legal aid system compares favourably with any in the European Union.

Mr. Fabricant: I am disappointed that my hon. Friend could not provide me with the actual figures. If he could, I believe that they would show that this country is more than generous with legal aid compared with other European countries.

I wish to press my hon. Friend on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson). What action will he take to target legal aid precisely—with particular reference to the area committees that he mentioned earlier?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend will know that the White Paper reforms that we announced last year and the measures that I announced this afternoon will do exactly what he asks: target resources where they are most needed. It is now clear that the fact that our legal aid system is as comprehensive as any in the European Union can be added to the good news of rapidly falling unemployment compared with our European competitors, to demonstrate that life is better in a Conservative Britain.

Legal Aid Budget

32. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on his plans to control the legal aid budget. [16729]

Mr. Streeter: The Government have embarked on a radical reform programme to control the legal aid budget. We are committed to taking the reforms forward through consultation and piloting, and some key changes will require legislation. My hon. Friend will have heard the additional measures that I mentioned some moments ago.

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. He is obviously aware of the great concern about the amount of legal aid money that is being spent on those who could afford legal representation from their own funds. Will he confirm that, when looking at the system, he will also look at the dubious circumstances in which some community law centres purport to operate? He will be aware—I have raised the matter with his Department in the past—that the Charity Commission has expressed grave concerns about some of those law centres, which, effectively, act as a front for the Opposition.

Mr. Streeter: I shall now look even more closely at the law centre problem that my hon. Friend rightly raises with me. It is important to get the balance right in our legal aid reforms. We are committed to helping those who need help to gain access to justice, but we must ensure that the taxpayer is not overburdened. It is disappointing that the Labour party does not support our proposal to introduce a cash-limited legal aid budget. I described it as an expensive locomotive to which we seek to apply the brakes; I have no doubt that, under a Labour Government, it would become a runaway train.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Am I correct to assume that the Minister has just announced two completely new

policy initiatives that would have the effect of denying legal aid to some of my constituents on very low incomes? What really matters, and what is winding up the public, is how it is possible for very wealthy people so to organise their private affairs and assets that their declarations to the legal aid authorities effectively amount to fraudulent applications for money and legal aid. Ministers should concentrate on those areas rather than tighten up the criteria through little sly deals that deny my constituents on low incomes proper legal representation.

Mr. Streeter: I am sorry but, once again, the hon. Gentleman is badly out of date. We have already taken the measures necessary to close the door on legal aid abuse by apparently wealthy individuals. I referred earlier to the special investigations unit that we set up many months ago, which is now bearing fruit. It is beginning to work and we have closed that door. The hon. Gentleman is mistaken; not a single constituent of his with a genuine legal issue who should be supported by the taxpayer will lose out as a result of our reforms. We are closing the door on abuse on behalf of the British taxpayer.

Civil Dispute Resolution

33. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his policy towards alternative dispute resolution in civil justice; and if he will make a statement. [16730]

Mr. Streeter: The development of alternative dispute resolution in all its forms has broadened consumer choice in dispute resolution. ADR can provide a more appropriate way to settle many disputes where the parties do not need recourse to the coercive powers of the courts. My party is doing all that it can to encourage ADR.

Mr. Jenkin: Would not one method of reducing the legal aid bill be the provision of more avenues to ordinary individuals to settle disputes—such as those between neighbours or between small businesses about debts—using an adjudicator rather than going through the full courts process? Will my hon. Friend and his Department do everything possible to ensure that those avenues are more widely available?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is right to raise that point. Under the Woolf proposals, it is our intention to put alternative dispute resolution at the heart of civil justice. He will be interested to know that we produced a booklet last year entitled "Resolving disputes without going to court" to alert potential litigants to the possibilities of ADR. Last May we also set up a pilot scheme based in the Central London county court for all cases in which claims exceed £3,000 and we are monitoring the results of that carefully. There is no doubt that ADR has a large part to play in the British civil justice system.

Criminal Justice Costs

34. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans his Department has to reduce the cost to public funds of those aspects of the criminal justice system for which his Department is responsible; and if he will make a statement. [16731]

37. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans his Department has to reduce the cost to public funds of those aspects of the criminal justice system for which his Department is responsible; and if he will make a statement. [16734]

Mr. Streeter: A number of initiatives are under way in my Department to reduce costs. They include the radical proposals for legal aid in the White Paper entitled "Striking the Balance", steps to reduce delay in the courts, such as the introduction of plea and directions hearings in the Crown court, and a review of time limits in the magistrates courts. In taking forward those initiatives, care must be taken to balance the many conflicting interests of those involved in the criminal justice system.

Mr. Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that my constituents would be rightly concerned that the legal aid budget doubled between 1990 and 1995 to £1.4 billion, and is due to go up yet again this year? Can he assure them that those who are in real need will get legal aid, and that we will get more value for the pounds that are spent?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is right. We want to ensure that those who have genuine grievances have access to justice, but we want to get the balance right between their interests and those of the taxpayer. All our reforms are shaped to that end. I believe that they are right and that they will make a significant difference to the legal aid budget as they are rolled out.

Mr. Atkinson: Does my hon. Friend accept that one of the greatest uncounted costs in a criminal justice system is delay, which wastes so much of the time of witnesses and, in particular, of the police, who can ill afford it? Will he therefore welcome the consultation paper issued by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to consider ways of speeding up justice, including the possibility of ending the right of jury trial for some defendants?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the important statement made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary last week. We will seek the views of people in Britain about those major, radical proposals to reform our criminal justice system. Again, it is a matter of getting the balance right. I believe that our proposals have a great deal of merit, and we look forward to the consultation process.

Information Technology (Government Strategy)

3.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): Last November, I laid before Parliament the Green Paper "government.direct" (Cm 3438) setting out the Government's strategy for the electronic delivery of central Government services. This strategy forms part of the Government's information society initiative led by my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology, and complements our policies to promote the use of IT in business, in education and by the public at large, and to help this country adapt to the information society. Today I have placed in the Library, and it is available in the Vote Office, a paper reporting on the results of consultation on the Green Paper and indicating the way forward to a radical change for the better in Government service delivery.

People interact with Government daily, whether they are applying for vehicle and driving licences, complying with regulatory requirements and filling in Government forms, or paying taxes. "Government.direct" envisages a time when people will no longer have to queue up, fill out paper forms and send off cheques for Government licences; instead, they will be able to link directly into government through their television sets or from kiosks in post offices, libraries and shopping centres.

Services will be more accessible, more convenient, easier to use, quicker in response and less costly to the taxpayer. As the Cabinet Minister responsible for public service, I find the prospect of delivering services electronically direct to the public enormously exciting.

This initiative forms part of the programme of public service reform, which has already established the citizens charter, next steps agencies and the deregulation initiative as a means of raising the quality of services and making them customer-driven.

Reaction to the Green Paper has been substantial and positive, with nearly 300 responses. I am pleased to say that they show broad support for our intentions, particularly our determination that the initiative should be truly cross-governmental and customer-centred.

However, concerns have also been raised. Some suspect that our aim is not to raise the quality of service but simply to cut costs, or to create a huge central database on individual citizens. Such fears are groundless. There are also concerns about data protection and about potential marginalisation of the disadvantaged and the disabled. I assure the House that we are determined to find solutions on data protection, and we are equally determined that electronic services will benefit everybody.

Last year, the Government launched "IT for all" in order to raise public awareness of, and provide wider public access to, information and communications technologies. I am particularly pleased that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has announced plans to redirect the millennium fund towards information and communication technology projects. After 2001, this could enable institutions such as citizens advice bureaux and public libraries to provide help to access electronic services for those who lack the confidence or opportunity to use a public access terminal.

In taking our plans forward, we have three objectives. First, we will build on the Green Paper by continuing the dialogue with those who have made substantial comments, such as the National Consumer Council, the Consumers Association and Justice. We will explore with universities how we can best draw on their creative thinking, too. We will work closely with the Data Protection Registrar to produce data protection arrangements that command public confidence.

Secondly, we will give the general public an opportunity to try electronic service delivery for themselves through pilot schemes. Some have been launched already. Others that I expect to see launched in the next few weeks will: first, enable the citizen to use one electronic form to tell several Departments about a change of employment status; secondly, bring citizens charter information to electronic terminals in the high street; thirdly, bring electronic services to the rural post office; and fourthly, allow Internet access to large Government geographical and geological databases. More will follow. The views of the public on pilot schemes will be sought and recorded through market research, and the results will be published to inform the debate.

Our third objective is to begin to plan the full-scale implementation of "government.direct", drawing on what we learn from our discussions and the pilots. As soon as we are able, we shall lay a White Paper before Parliament, setting out our plan for implementation, including any legislation that may be needed. We expect to rely on the private sector to lead in the development of technology and to provide the capital investment necessary to be repaid by savings in central Government service delivery costs.

As the Minister reponsible for public service, I shall work with colleagues across government to take this initiative forward, with the support of the central IT unit, which was set up just over a year ago in the Cabinet Office, with people drawn from the public and private sectors. I would particularly like to thank ministerial colleagues who are participating in the programme of pilots, and private sector sponsors such as BT, Electronic Data Services, ICL, Intergraph and Microsoft, who have shown commitment and imagination in their support for the programme.

This information technology initiative will help, for example, the pensioner at the rural post office to check his or her income tax, and the parent in the urban high street to compare the performance of local schools. It will lighten the burden of government on the small business man, and it will help those seeking work to sift job vacancies. It will make dealing with Government as easy as the supermarket laser checkout or the bank cash machine. It is government made easy, and made easy for everyone. If the take-up of electronic services follows the pattern of that for cash machines, five years from now, 25 per cent. of simple Government transactions with the public could be electronic.

Our plans for the use of information technology to provide services in a fundamentally different way will have radical and welcome implications over the long term for the size and shape of central Government. I commend our plans to the House.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his statement. I welcome his initiatives, and thank him for the courteous way in which he deals with all such matters. However, the earlier Green Paper and today's statement bear all the marks of a last-gasp technology gimmick from the party of the past.

Why was Al Gore able to present the four-year record of achievement in September 1996 while the Government were still pussy-footing about with a discussion document? Have the Government not betrayed citizens already, by failing to harness user-friendly technology to make government more accessible?

Have not the Government already sold business short by failing to exploit information technology in scything through red tape? How will the right hon. Gentleman avoid a new, dangerous split between the information haves and the information have-nots? Is he not aware of the danger of citizens' personal data falling foul of Big Brother Government or private sector cowboys bent on a quick buck? Why does he not beef up the Data Protection Agency to counter that threat?

Why have the Government headed for the hills over the £22 billion millennium bug issue? Why has the right hon. Gentleman ignored repeated warnings that it could be the next BSE-style crisis to hit government? Have not his Government been ducking and diving on the real issues, leaving the next Government to clean up the mess?

Why do not the Government come clean with their staff by publishing their own estimate of job losses, for example? What is the right hon. Gentleman doing to involve staff as partners in the management of such a profound change? Where are his staff training and development proposals? How much Government cash has been earmarked for the investment? Have the Government instead, as we all expect, thrown themselves entirely at the mercy of the private sector? Does not the statement demonstrate a failure of imagination and leadership from a failed Government, breathing their last after the humiliation of Wirral, South?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks—at least at the outset of his series of questions. I shall deal briefly with five of them.

First, we are spending at the rate of £2 billion a year in central Government on information technology: a very substantial part of total Government running costs. The Government have not been afraid, either Department by Department or centrally, to use modern information technology. Our response represents a radical step forward in the use of IT to the benefit of our citizens.

As to the difference between the information haves and have-nots, the right hon. Gentleman is right. It is very important that manual systems are continued in parallel with the use of modern information technology, so that those who are not familiar with or do not have an opportunity to use modern IT can use the existing paper-driven system for as long as that is necessary. I have already said that I hope that the citizens advice bureaux will play a full part in this radical revolution of the way in which Government services are provided, by facilitating services for citizens who cannot or do not wish to use them directly.

On third-party access to data, it is very important that the Data Protection Agency and the registrar herself are satisfied about protection against illegal and improper third-party use. There is no difference between the two Front Benches on that.

I turn to the millennium bug: the prospect that some computer systems will fail in 2000, because 20 or 30 years ago, when the software systems were written, planners never assumed that the hardware would last that long. My hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology has laboured long and hard to ensure that the private sector is aware of its responsibilities, and we have jointly ensured that all Departments must by the end of this year have drawn up plans, and by the end of next year implemented plans, to protect the public against any faults.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and I published a White Paper last year on civil service training and development, which made explicit reference to the need for developing computer skills. I congratulate the civil service on embracing those new developments with great alacrity.

Sir Trevor Skeet (North Bedfordshire): If I understand my right hon. Friend the Minister correctly, his statement is about using technology to make more information available on Government services on a 24-hour basis. Will it be a precursor of new developments? Will he be a little more specific on cost? He indicated the amount of capital expenditure going into IT at the moment. Although the proposal concerns only a very tiny part of overall expenditure, what will be its expenditure effect on the Government?

Mr. Freeman: One of the principal benefits of modern information technology is that information can be supplied to the citizen 24 hours a day, seven days a week; not just when the office is open. That principle of not only accessible but open government is extremely important.

No one knows what the cost will be, because we must test, pilot by pilot, whether the citizen wants this information service to be delivered electronically. It is important that Government do not dictate. The citizen knows best what is needed, and the private sector will lead with the development of technology. I confirm that we expect the private sector to make the initial capital investment. All our conversations with the private sector lead us to believe that that will certainly be the case.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Does the Chancellor of the Duchy accept that, although this interim statement on the transmission of Government-held information is important, so far as open government is concerned, it would carry greater conviction if it were accompanied by a freedom of information Act based on the presumption that Government-held information should be made available to the public, except for certain narrowly specified and policed categories?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept the recommendation of Justice, that the supervisory and enforcement powers of the Data Protection Registrar should be strengthened? Is it his intention that terminals should be available in rural areas, particularly sparsely populated areas, where it is difficult for people to get to Government offices or other centres to obtain the information to which they are entitled?

Mr. Freeman: Our code of open government, which applies to civil servants and Ministers alike, presumes that information, analysis and explanation of decisions should be made available. I believe that the use of modern information technology will make government more open,

[Mr. Freeman]

not less: information will not be confined to the filing cabinet. A freedom of information Act would make no practical difference to the range of information that should be open to citizens.

The code encourages civil servants and Ministers to work on the presumption that information should be available except in narrowly drawn circumstances. Most countries follow that practice, and I believe that it would have broad support in the House. The exceptions involve secret intelligence and diplomatic relations with other countries. The presumption is openness of government, and our reforms will enable that principle to be more widely applied.

As for the comments of Justice on the status of the registrar and the law, we shall have to consult on that, and that process has only just begun. I am sensitive to the point made by the hon. Member.

Yes, terminals should be available throughout rural areas. Modern technology knows no geographical or time boundaries. We are carrying out a trial in a rural post office in Devon to find out how citizens react to the availability of a computer terminal to supply information that would otherwise be available only by expensive telephone or by paper.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his excellent statement. Will he, in turn, join me in congratulating the Editor of the *Official Report*, Mr. Ian Church, on the award he received from the Campaign for Freedom of Information for the parliamentary web site on the world wide web, which had encouragement from and the enthusiasm of the Information Committee? How long will it be before motorists are able to renew their vehicle excise licence and pay the duty by using a kiosk in their local library or from a PC in their own homes?

Mr. Freeman: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and his Committee's determination to introduce modern technology into the workings of Parliament. A great deal can be done, and I welcome the arrival of *Hansard* on the Internet. My hon. Friend raises an interesting prospect with regard to car tax. Our vision is that, instead of queueing at a main post office or corresponding by mail to renew our car tax, it should be possible to do so entirely electronically.

With the approval of Parliament, central databases could confirm that a car has passed the MOT test and that a valid certificate of insurance has been issued. An electronic signature—a credit card-sized mechanism—could validate that a person is who he says he is, and a car tax disc could be issued immediately.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that many demarcations and restrictive practices that grew up in the former age of information collection are simply irrelevant and crippling in the modern information technology age? The common register of businesses, for example, is not available, because, although the component parts—company registered offices, and so on—must be published, the data are compiled with the use of Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise powers. That means that the product cannot be available. Do the Government propose an overhaul of the legislation relating to the main streams of Government information to make that information publicly available?

Mr. Freeman: I believe that we should rethink the divisions between Departments, laterally and radically. I feel, for instance, that the distinction between the Customs and Excise, Contributions Agency and the Inland Revenue in the collection of moneys due from the citizen to the state can be drawn more simply, transparently and openly. But the permission of Parliament, given through statute law reform, will be needed for the comparison of data held by different agencies—and, indeed, for the transmission of data between Departments.

As I have said, a radical rethink is needed if we are no longer to rely entirely on the circulation of paper between Departments. We can transfer data between Departments for the convenience of the citizen, but only with the permission of Parliament.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I envy my right hon. Friend his sense of excitement, but will he consider for a moment the most important aspect of contact between the citizen—the subject—and Government: personal contact between one person and another? The depersonalisation that is implicit in much of what my right hon. Friend has said this afternoon will not be welcomed by everyone. Does he recognise that a real danger is implicit in the codifying of every sort of communication, and in the eventual replacement by a hole in the wall of the Government counter with someone behind it?

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend's vision fills me with horror, but there is no inconsistency in using modern information technology to replace the post office, the fax machine or, perhaps, even the telephone. I want to speed the flow of information, but I do not want information to be depersonalised.

One of the biggest criticisms that can be made by the citizen and, indeed, Members of Parliament of reforms made since the war is that such depersonalisation has taken place. Sometimes we need a face—a person to talk to. I do not mean a face on a video conference screen; I mean people talking face to face. I believe, however, that these reforms should permit a sufficient reduction in other clerical and running costs, to facilitate an increase in personal contact rather than the reverse.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, without a strong commitment from the Government in terms of money, his statement is so much rubbish? There is no indication that enough money is available for training, and there is certainly not enough for the provision of hardware.

When the right hon. Gentleman talks about the Department of Transport being able to issue any kind of document, he will be aware that not enough money has even been written into the Department's budget in this and coming years to provide for the information technology that is necessary to run it. Will he examine the American experience, which shows that change of this kind is important to young white males, and will he come back and tell us how he intends to change that with real cash?

Mr. Freeman: We are spending real cash. We are spending £2 billion a year on IT projects in central

Government, and I do not propose a significant increase. I am telling the House that, just as the Government use the Royal Mail to transmit paper between them and the citizen, so we can use information technology. The fact that, rather than the Royal Mail supplying paper, the private sector is supplying hardware and software, has no financial impact on the Government. Someone else is providing the investment and the service and Government pay for that, but they pay on the basis of usage rather than capital investment.

Sir Michael Marshall (Arundel): Does my right hon. Friend accept that his willingness to have an open session with the Parliamentary Information Technology Committee, involving people from industry as well as Members of both Houses, was much appreciated? One of the issues raised was crime. As many of the challenges posed by crime in the 21st century will be information technology-related, does he accept that, as well as receiving information, there is a unique and special opportunity for the public to give information through kiosks and eventually by way of television, and that that would help in the fight against crime?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I pay tribute to what the all-party Parliamentary Information Technology Committee has so far achieved. I look forward to working with PITCOM. My hon. Friend spoke about crime. It is not just the exchange of information that has to be regulated and regularised, where necessary by Parliament, but the efficiency with which different arms of the law work.

One thinks in particular of the probation service, the Crown Prosecution Service, the courts and the police. We have different computer systems, and they should be compatible. One of the main aims of the central direction of investment, or at least advice on how Departments should spend money, is to make sure that different computer systems are compatible, so that information can be exchanged electronically.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Minister agree that, while this will give the Government great power to carry on their Big Brother technique and to find out about the man in the street, the man in the street will not be able to find out where the Tory party gets its money?

Mr. Freeman: I have already explained that the initiative is not about creating greater powers for the state in relation to individual citizens. There is no question of a Big Brother, whether socialist or Tory. The ordinary citizen would not tolerate that, and nor would Parliament. Therefore, any plans for the dispatch of data between Government Departments or even involving third parties, which is not contemplated in our plans, that will assist the citizen, have the citizen's approval and are protected by law, should surely be welcomed.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the progress that he has announced for the electronic delivery of Government services, and I welcome his comments about personal contact. Will he confirm that the CCTA, which is based in my constituency, has been involved with the "government.direct" initiative, and will be involved in future in terms of the announcement and electronic delivery?

Mr. Freeman: I am happy to confirm that, and I pay tribute to the work of the CCTA, which started life as the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency about 25 years ago. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his work in support of the CCTA. It is a valuable resource of experience and advice for all central Government Departments, and I hope that its work expands.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Is the Minister aware that many of the initiatives that he would like to promote are already happening and well advanced? Is he also aware of the Cambridgeshire Childcare Links project, which was launched by my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) at Hinchingbrooke school in the Prime Minister's constituency a few weeks ago? That service aims to provide for parents who wish to return to work information on child care, jobs and training and social security benefits.

Will the Minister ask his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he is prepared to co-operate with Cambridgeshire Childcare Links to provide helpful benefits information that will allow parents interactive access as to their entitlement to benefit?

Mr. Freeman: I shall certainly pass that to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. I am well aware of the hon. Lady's support for local services in Cambridge. Not long ago, I had the pleasure of launching one such service in Kettering.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): I welcome my right hon. Friend's assurance that personal contact will not be replaced by some sort of virtual reality system. Will he assure the House that there will be efforts throughout the civil service to ensure that the process to simplify guidance and instruction about how to apply for benefits will be continued, to ensure that it is compatible with this new information technology era?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I emphasise again the importance of personal, caring and, in some cases—when it is to do with, for example, the Child Support Agency or the national health service—compassionate and understanding assistance, which is by no means incompatible with being a civil servant. That is what the House would expect—that personalised, proper service—and it must be against a background of regulations that are simple and written in the Queen's English.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Does the Minister accept that the history of the Government's involvement so far with large-scale information technology contracts is one of poorly defined contracts, large-scale expenditure, cost overruns and poor performance? Will he therefore assure the House that, if he proceeds down that road, it will be on the basis of carefully costed and piloted projects, which produce genuine improvements of service to ordinary people?

[Mr. Jim Cousins]

Will he also assure the House that his proposals are not a device for undermining the Royal Mail and the network of the nation's 20,000 post offices?

Mr. Freeman: It is certainly not our intention to undermine the Royal Mail, but I am glad to see it progress with the development of its own services; it should be congratulated on that. However, there are other ways in which Government Departments can communicate directly and in which the citizen can communicate with Government and vice versa. In the same way that Government embrace the quill pen and the letter, so we should embrace information technology.

I can confirm what the hon. Gentleman says about the importance of relying on properly costed pilots. For the past 50 years, all Governments, of whichever shade, have sometimes had projects that have overrun and been badly thought out. Others have been a great success—I am talking about information technology now. We must learn from that experience. That is why I propose a programme that is cautious. It tests what the citizen wants and what is feasible, pilot by pilot; and substantial money, committed either by the private or by the public sector, should not be given until that has happened.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that he is to be particularly congratulated on harnessing the unique expertise of the Government communication agency with that of the big players in IT, and that that will deliver quality services in a way that will be beyond the imagination of many people—and, if I may say so, in a way that seems beyond the imagination of the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster)? Is this not another move that shows that the character armour of this Government is open government and good-quality services to customers, whereas the character armour of the Labour party is rotten public services and secrecy?

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend was a distinguished junior Minister serving in the Cabinet Office, and he will know that it is extremely important to think long term and to have a strategic vision about how to deliver services better to the citizen. It is incumbent on all of us as Ministers to ask: what does the citizen want, how should the service be delivered, and how can we harness modern technology? I am sure that you would agree, Madam Speaker, that Parliament and even Whitehall sometimes appear to be still in the 19th century in terms of their procedures, whereas the private sector has welcomed with open arms 21st-century technology. Government should do likewise.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): With the caveat of the Government's failure to move on the question of freedom of information, may I unreservedly welcome the statement, which is enlightened, points the way forward and, in many measures, reflects Labour policy, which goes down effectively the same route?

In that spirit of camaraderie, may I draw the Minister's attention to Cumbria county council's application to the Millennium Commission in relation to the Genesis project, after several years of work by me in my office here, on the university of the Lakes project, and the county council's own work? The Minister referred to the commission in passing when he said that it was considering IT bids more sensitively. Our application on the Genesis project is in exactly this area of IT transfer, and is being dealt with by the commission over the next few days. Will he put in a good word for us, because we want to win the bid and to show the whole country that we can make this system work in Cumbria?

Mr. Freeman: I will make sure that the millennium commissioners are aware of that. It is important that local government should be involved in this initiative, and I have made sure that the central IT unit has talked to local authority associations to find out how we can trial some projects in their field of responsibility, too.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, but will he bear it in mind that it is only in the past 10 years that pupils have been educated in the use of information technology, and that there is widespread technophobia among those who did not learn about computers at school? Does he agree that adult education colleges will have an invaluable role to play in providing courses to help overcome that problem?

Mr. Freeman: There are some technophobes in Whitehall, as there are in Parliament; perhaps people over the age of 40, or perhaps even 30, might constitute the greater number. My hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology is doing exactly the right thing. He has launched "IT for all", which is aimed at familiarising those members of society—young and old—who find it difficult to comprehend how to use modern information technology. I greatly welcome his initiative, which I know will succeed.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Notwithstanding the right hon. Gentleman's "vision thing", will he accept that many millions of our fellow countrymen and women will not be excited by his statement? Will he consider my elderly constituent, Mrs. Williams of Pentre, who, when she goes into the post office, will be intimidated by his vision? Is not the timing of his statement somewhat gimmicky, in view of the imminent general election?

Mr. Freeman: No, that is not a fair charge. I have tried to present a sensible and balanced conclusion of two years' work. Frankly, anyone looking back at reports of the proceedings of the House will, I am sure, find that the Government committed themselves to large-scale use of the Royal Mail and that a number of hon. Members, and perhaps their constituents, were afraid that they might lose the communications. We must embrace modern technology; the private sector does, as do many Governments around the world. Given his background, I hope—indeed, I know—that the hon. Gentleman will not be counted as a computer Luddite.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Was my right hon. Friend as disappointed as I was that those on the Labour Front Bench were so backward in welcoming the announcement, especially as the Leader of the Opposition got into such a mess when he announced a deal with BT? Is the right hon. Gentleman perhaps worried that BT will spend its money on this scheme rather than leave it for Labour's windfall?

The piloting of schemes is clearly important, to see whether people will use high-street kiosks. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend has any announcement to make in that regard about the bid that I have made for my constituency to be one of the pilots.

Mr. Freeman: I am sure that we shall be involved in several dozen pilot schemes in the coming months and years. It is sensible to test precisely what the citizen wants and whether the technology works. I am sure that my hon. Friend will persist in his demands. His comments about Government and Opposition underline a central point: unlike the Opposition, who have the relative freedom to announce an idea, the Government have to examine it, consult on it, test it, think about it and then produce their response. They do not have the same luxury as the Opposition.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The Minister will be aware of my support for his view of the benefits that information technology can bring to cross-departmental activity. Against that background, will he explain, first, what steps he is taking to ensure that the allocation of contracts, especially in the context of privatisation, are not overly concentrated with one company or another? Secondly, will he say whether he agrees with the European Informatics Market, whose board includes a number of hon. Members from both sides of the House, that there ought to be primary legislation on data protection as a result of the European directive and of changes in technology? Finally, even with eight weeks to go until the general election, I would prefer to see the Minister at the Dispatch Box rather than a hologram.

Mr. Freeman: Clearly the Government must implement the European directive—we have about 12 months to do so—and we are urgently considering the form in which it should be implemented. There are a number of options, and several Departments are involved. The hon. Gentleman raises an important point about monopolies by individual IT suppliers. This must be watched, as we do not want several Departments to be reliant on a single supplier of hardware or software.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): Does my right hon. Friend share my disappointment that the Millennium Commission was unable to approve the bid by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux for a linked computerised system which would have greatly assisted the association in providing information similar to that which we are discussing? In that context, can he say whether it will be possible to place "government.direct" computer terminals in the association's bureaux?

Mr. Freeman: I share my hon. Friend's disappointment at the fact that the NACAB was not successful in its millennium bid. I very much hope that it will qualify for assistance from a redirection of the Millennium Commission's funding after 2001. We are trialling the provision of IT in one citizens advice bureau in Spennymoor in Yorkshire—*[Interruption.]* I do not know my geography. Modern IT would have corrected my statement that Spennymoor is in Yorkshire, and made it County Durham.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, just a few years hence, political historians will look back to this day and say, first, that it was a landmark day, and secondly, that the Labour party was a group of Luddites? Labour criticised my right hon. Friend's announcements and doubted his integrity in communicating with private companies. Does he agree that it is marvellous that, on this very day, the Cable Communications Association has announced that schools will be able to give access to the Internet to all their children for just £1 per child per day?

Mr. Freeman: The House will welcome not only what BT has done, but what the cable companies have done in terms of supplying modern IT to schools. The more primary and secondary schools that are connected, the better.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I welcome the statement, but a problem during the past five years has been that every hon. Member has been inundated by people whose lives have been wrecked by the inflexible computer technology and bureaucracy of the Child Support Agency. What worries me is that the very people who want to come into contact with government—an old-age pensioner at a local post office, a distraught ex-wife trying to get a CSA payment or a young labourer thrown out of work—are the very people who find it difficult to cope with these systems.

At the same time, government is being farmed out increasingly to agencies, there is a lack of parliamentary control, and all agencies are now required to have strict performance guidelines. I fear that, whatever my right hon. Friend has said, we will have fewer humans facing the public and more computers providing more inflexibility and bureaucracy, with the result that more people will be denied their basic human rights.

Mr. Freeman: I am sure that my hon. Friend is wrong. He referred to the Child Support Agency, which I am afraid has, in its past practice, relied on several different sources of information. Computers have not been talking to computers—in other words, those affected by the legislation have received conflicting information at different times, without having someone to talk to personally. In a number of cases—particularly where the work of the agency has been removed to remote parts of the United Kingdom—ordinary citizens have been unable to talk to someone about their problems. We can and should embrace modern information technology without depersonalising it. Frankly, we can reduce, not increase, bureaucracy if we do it sensibly.

Mr. Fabricant *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I will allow the hon. Member for Mid–Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) to make a point of order to correct what he has said.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful, Madam Speaker—you have anticipated my point of order. It was a slip of the tongue; the charge would be £1 per pupil per year.

Packaging Waste

4.14 pm

The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones): I beg to move,

That the draft Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

I must first apologise that the Secretary of State is not present, but, as I am sure hon. Members are aware, the Environment Council is meeting in Brussels today and tomorrow. However, his absence gives me the opportunity to speak on the subject. As I chaired the Environment Committee's inquiry into recycling, it is a real pleasure to be associated with an issue that has been a matter not only of controversy but of considerable fascination for entire industries and for many pressure groups.

I should start by putting the regulations in context. We need to obtain better value from our waste, in the interests of the environment, of United Kingdom competitiveness and of the consumer. That is the central objective of the Government's waste strategy. Our strategy, however, is particularly relevant to packaging waste.

Each year, we create 8 million tonnes of packaging waste, and—although it is the largest recyclable element in each of our dustbins—about 2 to 3 million tonnes of it goes to landfill. That practice is simply not sustainable. We cannot continue to divert ever more of our countryside to providing more landfill capacity. Landfill generates methane, which is a major contributor to global warming. Moreover, I think that all hon. Members know that the process of finding and planning new landfill sites is extremely difficult. I am particularly aware of that difficulty, because it is covered by one of my ministerial responsibilities.

Above all, it is important to harness the long-term economic benefits available from treating waste as a secondary raw material rather than simply as a costly liability. Therefore, the system that we are proposing has two principal objectives. The first is to implement the Government's challenge on producer responsibility for packaging waste. The second objective is to enable the United Kingdom to implement recycling and recovery targets in the European Community directive on packaging and packaging waste.

The producer responsibility challenge is about using the market to deliver an environmental objective, and requires that the price that the consumer pays should reflect a contribution to the costs of dealing with a product as waste. Producers have obligations to recycle and recover waste in proportion to the number of goods that they place on the market. In packaging, that obligation would create an incentive, first, to minimise the amount of packaging needed for the purpose; secondly, to ensure that one reuses packaging whenever possible; and, thirdly, to find more efficient and cost-effective methods of recycling and recovery—for example, by finding new markets for recyclate.

Broadly, by 2001, we are aiming to double the amount of packaging waste—paper, glass, plastic, steel and aluminium—that we recycle or recover. We are currently achieving about 30 per cent. recovery of packaging, and we need to increase that to 50 per cent.—the minimum target set by the EC directive. As the United Kingdom has relatively little waste-to-energy capacity, we expect most of the recovery to occur through materials recycling.

Our initiative will bring real benefits to local communities, local authorities, voluntary bodies and everyone concerned with recycling. By 2000, we aim to have convenient and close-to-home recycling facilities for eight out of 10 households—in some cases through new kerbside schemes, and elsewhere through a big expansion in bank systems. The principal means of achieving that goal will be through collective business schemes, of which the prototype—Valpak—is well advanced. Valpak reflects a substantial commitment by more than 100 leading businesses which have subscribed to its start-up costs.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Is not there a concern in the industry—which the Minister must have heard expressed very loudly in the past couple of months—that Valpak is okay, but that it is not yet up and running properly? It seems that some of the key players, especially those in the retail sector, are already leaving the Valpak framework, thereby threatening it. Unless those retailers can be persuaded to come back into the scheme and to support it strongly, it will not be possible to secure the objectives desired by the Minister, by myself and by everyone who is interested in the subject.

Mr. Jones: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying; it is important to keep the retailers on board. There is every incentive for them to stay on board, because they could not deliver their part of the recycling targets on their own. They have to work co-operatively with someone. In view of the administrative overheads and the need to have the system up and running, it makes much more sense for them to stay in the Valpak framework, or whatever alternatives come forward, rather than to try to go it alone.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I have no doubt that the Minister has received correspondence from the Paper Federation. One thousand jobs in my constituency are wrapped up in the industry. The federation says that although it supports the scheme and wants it to work, it is worried that if things go wrong, there will not be an adequate review procedure. The federation says that it cannot necessarily wait two years if employment in the industry generally is being threatened. Can the Minister say something today that is helpful to the industry and which reassures it that the Government, of whatever persuasion—obviously my own people have views on these matters as well—will keep an eye on the industry and on employment within it, to ensure that the scheme is working properly and is not damaging areas of it?

Mr. Jones: This is pioneering legislation, as no doubt the hon. Gentleman and the industry recognise. It is extremely important, therefore, that we keep the matter under close review and if necessary, make alterations. That is why the review process, about which I shall say something later, is part of the overall package. The hon. Gentleman talks about a period of two years. He should remember that we are talking about 1998 and that we are already almost three months into 1997. Bearing it in mind that 1997 is the year for the collection of statistics and

notification, the review of the operation will occur early on. That is a reflection of the fact that we know that we are breaking new ground.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Will the Minister, on the central point of this debate, address himself to the key issue? Contrary to the agreement that seemed to have been reached on 15 December 1995, the regulations will permit retailers to use transit packaging arising in their own back yard, to meet their obligations. That will increase the pressure on other packaging industries upstream and will undermine the viability of Valpak. How does the Minister justify that?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman must have missed what I said about retailers a moment ago. Retailers cannot fulfil their obligations simply from their own back yard packaging. They do not have packaging arising in all the categories that we are talking about, so they could not meet all the targets. The hon. Gentleman said that that was the key point of the debate, but I believe that there are a number of key points. If I can make a little progress, I shall highlight them. I believe that one of the main points of the debate is to ensure that we do not go down the road that some other countries have travelled—particularly the Germans—of creating a monster that is environmentally damaging as well as extremely costly.

I was talking about Valpak. Perhaps I should also tell the House that there is a second scheme, aimed at the dairy industry, called Difpak, whose members have recently announced their intention to proceed. Such schemes are run entirely by business. Any business that joins an approved collective scheme is entirely exempt from the regulations, as long as the scheme achieves the aggregate recycling and recovery obligations of its members. I hope that the House agrees that that is a substantial encouragement to join a business-run scheme.

The regulations impose three main obligations. First, there is a registration obligation: businesses must register with one of the environment agencies and must provide packaging data by 31 August 1997 at the latest. In other words, they must choose whether to carry out their obligations individually or to join a collective scheme. Secondly, from 1998 onwards, there is a recovery and recycling obligation. Businesses must take reasonable steps to recover and recycle specific tonnages of packaging waste, which are calculated to take account of the amount of packaging flowing through, the function that they perform in relation to the packaging—that means, for example, whether they convert packaging or fill packaging—and the UK targets, which are 52 per cent. recovery and 16 per cent. recycling for each material by 2001.

Sir Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Some small companies are concerned about whether they might be discriminated against if they do not join one of the major schemes. Will my hon. Friend confirm that there will be no difference of approach in regard to individual companies that seek to register on their own and those that choose to do it together?

Mr. Jones: That is true—the smallest companies are exempt from the regulations, although the slightly larger ones will be caught as the phasing comes in. I can confirm that if people want to go it alone and create their own scheme to recover their packaging, they will be free to do so, provided that they do it effectively. If the business is in a scheme, the scheme carries out the tasks.

Thirdly, there is a certifying obligation. Businesses and schemes must certify annually that they have recovered and recycled the required tonnages of packaging waste.

The Environment Agency, in England and Wales, and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency will monitor compliance with the regulations and will have enforcement powers comparable with those that they exercise in relation to their other responsibilities. Businesses following the individual route will need to pay a registration fee to the appropriate agency of £750, while schemes will pay a fee in relation to their membership.

The primary purpose of the regulatory regime is to discourage free riders. Industry told us clearly that that was a basic requirement if the initiative was to succeed. It is therefore important that the enforcement role of the agencies is credible and effective. Much of the agencies' effort will be devoted to education, promotion and assisting industry, but enforcement will be necessary. A public register of businesses and schemes will list all those who have registered and who have self-certified performance of their obligation.

The agencies will also have an important role in relation to data—aggregating information from businesses, to provide a more accurate national picture of how and where the 8 million tonnes of packaging is created. That role also responds to an important industry request for much better data, which are essential to ensure a fair distribution of obligation, as well as to ensure that the United Kingdom is on course to achieve its targets.

I now refer to small businesses. While we have accepted the industry's request for a shared approach, many people have also accepted that it is neither efficient nor profitable to place an obligation on every business, such as the 200,000 or so small shops. The regulations therefore apply initially only to businesses with a turnover of more than £5 million. We estimate that 4,000 businesses with a key role in the packaging chain will be affected. In the year 2000, the threshold will drop to a turnover of £1 million, and we estimate that 9,000 businesses will be affected, including wholesalers who, from that year, will pick up the selling obligation of the small shopkeeper. We believe that large and medium-sized businesses are best placed to ensure that the system is up and running as smoothly as possible.

One of the key features of our approach is that it is based on recycling and reprocessing, not simply collection. If we briefly consider what has happened in Germany, the advantages of our approach become clear. The German householder has five separate dustbins; each German household is served not only by the municipal collection lorry, but by a separate lorry run by the Duales System Deutschland—DSD. The two are not co-ordinated, and there are extremely high targets for recycling and recovery.

The consequences are well known: in its early years, the German system was collecting vast quantities of waste, for which it has struggled to find a use. Today, there is still a significant trade in exporting plastic waste, often with a dowry, to third-world countries, where reprocessing is a euphemism for environmental degradation. The current cost of the German approach is £1.7 billion per annum—an approach that we have wholeheartedly rejected.

[Mr. Jones]

When the Select Committee, under my chairmanship, published its report on recycling in 1994, we drew particular attention to the issue. I hope that the House will forgive me if I quote from the press notice that launched our report:

"On the subject of recycling targets, we recommend that the aim of local authorities and other bodies should not just be the *collection* of recycled material. Collection should be viewed as the first stage of the recycling process; it is equally important to develop market demand and adequate processing capacity. We believe that this should be taken into account by the Department of the Environment and the European Union in the formulation of policy, in order to avoid the surplus of collected material as resulted from the German DSD scheme."

By contrast, we have taken great pains to build our approach on the views of business, and we have harnessed the expertise of those with practical knowledge of the industries involved. That is the basis for the regulations. By allowing for business choice, they provide the stimulus of competition. By providing for business self-assessment and self-certification, they offer a deregulatory approach to monitoring and compliance. By providing for exemption for an approved business compliance scheme, they encourage business to develop cross-sectoral co-operation, efficiency and incentives. By focusing on the reprocessing end of the cycle, they ensure that we do not collect material that cannot be used and that the full range of businesses involved have an incentive to find new markets for recyclate.

Mr. Sheerman: I and most people who know anything about the subject would agree with the Minister about not wanting to go down the German track, because we do not want that sort of bureaucracy, but at least in all the other systems that I have seen, there is a regulator who conducts audits and checks that the recycling is being done. Is the Minister sure that the Environment Agency has the capacity and the ability to check, audit and control?

Mr. Jones: I have every confidence in the Environment Agency, which does a good job in respect of all its responsibilities. I have never heard anybody suggest that the agency is incompetent in this respect. I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comment about not wanting to go down the German route—that contrasts with the remarks of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) who, when speaking to the Environmental Services Association not long ago, praised the way in which the Germans operate.

Mr. Meacher: That is a complete falsehood—I have never said that this country should adopt the German method. It is far more expensive per capita, I have never supported it and the hon. Gentleman should withdraw—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Before appealing to the Minister, the hon. Gentleman should rephrase the word "falsehood".

Mr. Meacher: I am glad to do so. The Minister would not wish to impute to me something that I certainly did not say.

Mr. Jones: We always welcome conversions on the road to Damascus.

For all those reasons, we believe that the costs of the UK approach will be substantially below those of any of our major competitors. We estimate that by 2001, if collective business schemes are successful, annual costs will be at the low end of the range set out in the cost compliance assessment—that is, around £270 million. Furthermore, we believe that those costs should be viewed essentially as transitional costs, necessary to provide improved recycling infrastructure which, as it becomes available, will be readily deployed by industry. Rising landfill costs and greater use of secondary raw materials, with their long-term advantages to the UK economy, mean that, in the long run, costs will fall. A sustainable approach to packaging waste is, in competitiveness terms, a real plus.

Even putting to one side the UK's policy in that respect, I remind hon. Members that doing nothing is not an option. This is an issue of grave concern to UK packaging manufacturers and exporters seeking to trade with member states that have adopted barriers to trade under the guise of environmental protection. It was for that reason that many in the industry pressed us to negotiate a directive that provided a clear single market framework for the free circulation of packaging, while ensuring that each member state met certain minimum recycling and recovery objectives.

We are now using the directive to safeguard UK interests. We and others have formally challenged the Danish can ban, which restricts the sale of beverages to refillable containers—for a local brewery based in Copenhagen, that requirement is easy to meet, but it is a substantial barrier to any UK exporter. We are urgently considering the latest German proposals on refillable containers, which raise similar issues. The notification procedure that the directive requires gives us a real opportunity to challenge such barriers to trade, and it is encouraging that several member states have already withdrawn or modified their proposals as a result of that procedure, or in anticipation of it. However, for the directive to work effectively, we must be confident that we in the UK can achieve the recycling and recovery targets that it sets.

The regulations now before the House are, as I said, based on a number of principles established in negotiation with industry, starting with the producer responsibility group and continuing with other bodies. There are few trade associations with a substantial interest in packaging that have not played a part in putting together that approach. Even more important, many business leaders have given up substantial management time to develop proposals that will make this a success.

Businesses as diverse as Procter and Gamble, Courtaulds, David S. Smith, Tesco, British Glass, British Polythene Industries, Marks and Spencer, Guinness, Coca-Cola and Carnaud Metal Box have given substantial management time and effort. The business leaders who are members of the advisory committee are continuing to help devise solutions to the difficult issues that we have encountered.

Inevitably with such a process, rapid progress was made early on in agreeing the broad approach, but there has been difficulty in the detail and in finding a solution to issues where sectoral interests differ. In that context, I pay special tribute to Sir Peter Parker who, as president of the Industry Council for Packaging and the Environment, chaired a

critical meeting on 15 December 1995, which agreed a formula for the shared obligation and the principles on which the current regulations are based.

However, in a process that involves so many sectors of business, it would be wrong not to acknowledge that there are issues of importance to specific sectors, which remain outstanding concerns. As with any new system, there are fears of the future. Will there be adequate recycling capacity? Will some businesses have to pay much more than others to obtain waste for recycling? Will the ones that hold waste co-operate, or do we need a separate waste holder obligation?

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I entirely agree that it is an important process and that we are still in the early stages, dealing with global and strategic issues, but I have a direct constituency interest—250 jobs hanging, if I may put it that way, on coat-hangers and the production thereof. Can the Minister say yet whether, as in other European countries, fabricated plastic coat-hangers will be exempt from that process, at least at this stage?

Mr. Jones: The regulations do not lay down that degree of detail. They are broad definitions, and it will be for industry, working with the Environment Agency, to ensure that what happens in practice reflects the spirit of the measures that we are placing before the House. I can give the hon. Gentleman what I regard as a commonsense view on that, but I would not necessarily regard it as a definitive view, because plastic coat-hangers can exist for any of several different purposes. They might be sold and therefore be ordinary products, or they might be given away free with dry cleaning or be included with the suit or shirt that one buys in a shop, in which case they are packaging, as cardboard stiffening, pins and so on would be.

As I said, it will be important to answer several questions. One of those is: will all the parties play an equitable part in accessing waste from the domestic waste stream? Another might be: do the activity percentages in the regulations fairly reflect what each part of the packaging chain actually does?

Many of those concerns can be answered only when there are better data and when the system has begun to function. I assure the House that we shall keep a careful watch on the way in which the regulations work in practice and will keep them under careful review, to ensure that nonsenses do not occur. The staged build-up to the directive targets should ensure that no one's burden is unreasonable in the early years. I know that there are some fears, but I hope to reassure hon. Members that some of them are unreasonable.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I join the Minister in paying tribute to Sir Peter Parker for the work that he has done in bringing us to this stage.

Does the Minister envisage a conflict with the advisory council or within the industry? He mentioned shared responsibility, but he also mentioned the market. It is difficult to see how we can have shared responsibility in a market scenario. Is the Minister aware of any anomalies or problems in such a situation?

Mr. Jones: I believe that, in the various parts of the chain, the shares have been sorted out very much along market lines. If, subsequently, it turns out that those shares are different, or if technology brings a different perspective to our debates on the matter, that too may change. I have learnt in politics the essential truth of the philosopher's question, that only one statement is true at all times and in all places

"And this too shall change."

Nothing is set in stone; nor should it be.

It is important to reassure those who have expressed some of the more unreasonable fears. One of them relates to the relative size of the retailer obligation, and to whether retailers will be able to meet their obligations from their own waste. Let us consider a large household name retailer. The obligation laid down by the regulations for such a business is likely to be for between 100,000 and 200,000 tonnes—in other words, between 3 and 5 per cent. of the entire United Kingdom recycling and recovery obligation will have to be met by that one business. It will have access to waste in its own back yard, but that source is unlikely to supply much more than half its needs. It will have very little of some of the materials that it needs, such as glass, aluminium and steel. In short, the largest players in the retail and pack filler sectors have large obligations, and will have no alternative but to co-operate with others, either in a scheme or in some other way, to satisfy the obligation.

As I said, ensuring that the regulations generate a successful UK initiative on packaging waste will be a process of dialogue for the Government, the agencies and business. There will inevitably be issues that need to be reassessed in the light of experience. That is why the Government have given a clear commitment to supporting the work of the advisory committee in carrying out a thorough review of the system once it is in operation, and to considering any recommendations that it makes. The work load of the committee for the review is already being mapped out. We are happy that it should look at issues of perceived inequity, such as the situation in the construction industry, and the proposal that all business users of packaging should be required to sort and separate waste.

For their part, the Government have pledged to keep under review the need for the regulations. As the amount of recycling increases, I have no doubt that we shall be able seriously to consider reducing their scope. Many businesses have written to me on this point, and I am certain that, whatever their concerns, given all that we have discussed and negotiated, the overwhelming majority of UK businesses want to adopt the regulations now. That message has also emerged from what has been said here today.

I also have no doubt that if success is to be achieved, it will come only by working with the market and with the businesses that are most closely involved. As the Secretary of State has said, the market is the only force powerful enough to deliver the objective of sustainable development. I therefore have no hesitation in asking the House to approve the regulations.

4.41 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I wish to make it clear immediately that the Opposition—soon, no doubt, to be the Government, if Wirral, South is anything to go by—strongly support the principle of increased

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

recovery and recycling of packaging waste. However, the issue has been handled by the Secretary of State in a manner that can only be described as shambolic.

At the outset, the right hon. Gentleman failed to take control of the issue and tried to hive off all responsibility to the industry. Given the diversity of business interests involved, that led, not surprisingly, to protracted wrangling and uncertainty. Then the right hon. Gentleman tried to reconcile the differences at the notorious meeting of 15 December 1995. If the Minister thinks that agreement was reached then, I have to tell him that there is still a great deal of disagreement about what is supposed to have been agreed on that occasion. Even after that, the calculation and assignment of legal obligation remains extremely complex and an unnecessary burden on business. Contrary to what the Minister said just now, we cannot even be sure that the terms of the European directive can be met.

The regulations that are now finally being introduced are more than eight months late, beyond the European Union deadline, following repeated delays. The statutory guidance that is so essential to the technical implementation of the scheme has still not been produced. The whole handling of the regulations has been a masterpiece of muddle, mismanagement and market excesses.

The fundamental flaw, as many in the industry have said, is that the principle of shared responsibility, which the Government purport to endorse, is incompatible with the free operation of market forces, which the Minister ended his speech by praising and which the Government certainly encourage.

At the 15 December meeting, it was clearly accepted and laid down that the share of the legal obligation attributed to each sector would correspond roughly to the share of the overall cost of recovery and recycling that each sector would bear. That key principle breaks down if those who have substantial obligations for packaging supplied to domestic consumers—that is, the retailers—can discharge a large part of their obligation by recovering and recycling commercial and industrial waste supplied to them by UK packers and fillers for which they have no producer responsibility obligations.

It would be wrong to say—I am not saying it, contrary to the Minister's assertion—that retailers can evade all their obligations in this way. I readily accept that retailers have the largest obligation, at 47 per cent., but it is a reasonable estimate—confirmed to me by the industry—that retailers can discharge as much as two thirds of their obligation by this means. Thus, they will be able to limit their share in the cost of the obligation to recover and recycle used packaging from the household waste stream to about 15 per cent. of the total. It is difficult to see how that can be a fair allocation of "shared" responsibility. It is in clear defiance of the third principle of the 15 December agreement, which is:

"Each sector must play an equitable part in relation to the domestic waste stream".

Moreover, that produces a series of other distortions elsewhere in the packaging chain. It will put many companies, particularly small and medium ones, at a serious competitive disadvantage—to answer an earlier Conservative intervention. They produce or supply the transit packaging, but because they are prevented from gaining access to it, they will have to discharge their obligations by recovering other, more expensive, material. Figures shown to me suggest that the wholesaler could face a cost of compliance of up to two and a half times as much as his retailer with an equivalent turnover.

For the same reasons, the regulations will make it less likely that packaging chain members with large quantities of non-obligated transit packaging will join in a collective or shared approach. That will undermine the viability of Valpak. Some major retailers, Tesco for one, have already made it clear that they will not participate. That will burden multi-material collective schemes, which are supposed to be the Government's preferred approach, with more difficult-to-recover materials and thus increase the cost of achieving compliance for their members. That in turn will generate a large cross-material subsidy between paper and other materials; some have estimated that it could amount to as much as £45 million a year. That will seriously disadvantage the paper industry.

It is surely evident that what is wrong with the regulations is the fact that the Secretary of State wanted to have his cake and eat it. He wanted, for reasons of party dogma, to leave it all to industry to decide and to wash his hands of any direct involvement or display of leadership.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have made it abundantly clear that we want to work with industry to ensure that it evolves a scheme of which it feels it has ownership. We do not want to go down the German road. I know that the hon. Gentleman is about the only person left on the Labour Front Bench who openly believes in a command and control economy, but that is not how we want to proceed. That is why we have worked with industry to come up with a decent set of regulations, for which it has a sense of ownership. I know that the hon. Gentleman is an enthusiast for the German system, but it has been disastrous.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman has such a taste for projecting his prejudices and insults that he simply does not listen to the facts. He should not say what I have already clearly refuted. I repeat that I have never supported the German scheme.

Mr. Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I shall not give way. I have never supported the German scheme. Germany's level of recovery and recycling is better than ours, but I have never supported the German green spot scheme. If the Minister suggests that I have, I shall give way to him.

Mr. Jones: I shall quote the hon. Gentleman verbatim from his speech to the Environmental Services Association. He said:

"We accept that a sensible regulatory regime, as in Germany or Japan, will be the best contribution to a thriving sector."

Mr. Meacher: That in no way suggests that we accept the German scheme. The scheme that the Secretary of State has introduced is to be repudiated because it leaves the problem entirely to industry to resolve, with companies quarrelling among themselves endlessly,

failing to resolve the problems or to display any leadership. He should have introduced a sensible regulatory regime that listens to industry but in which the Government then make up their mind in the light of their consultation with industry. That is certainly how we would proceed.

When the shared responsibility approach was finally decided on—it is unique to the UK and has resulted in a complex and previously untried set of legal arrangements and obligations—the Secretary of State went along with it. When that approach was then distorted by the exercise of market powers by certain sections of the industry, he tamely assented to it. That is why this whole exercise is now in such a mess. It is all due to the right hon. Gentleman's abdication of responsibility and chronic lack of leadership.

In two months' time, the Government will be swept away. They may be swept away by a landslide, but they will certainly be swept away. In view of the mess created by the regulations, I want to make it clear that things cannot simply be left as they are or merely referred to the Advisory Committee on Packaging for consideration during the two-year review. That would not be sufficient. If we were to do that, we would entrench cherry-picking, undermine Valpak and other multi-sector schemes, and weaken the shared approach. It would also make it almost impossible for many obligated companies to use the individual compliance route. The Government have insisted that that route be kept open so that the field is not tilted in favour of exemption schemes, but unless something is done, individual compliers will find it almost impossible to obtain the necessary reprocessing certificates, except at prohibitive prices.

Another difficulty if things are allowed to remain as they are under the regulations is that there is no plan to ensure that the necessary collection, storing and reprocessing capacity is available to meet higher targets in future years. That problem has now been made more acute by the standstill over the past year while industry waited to see exactly what obligations the Secretary of State would impose and by his recent increase in exemptions to the £5 million turnover threshold. The effect will be a huge increase in the need for reprocessing capacity in a few years' time, which will not be met in advance by market forces.

Basically, we now need a mechanism to ensure that obligated companies, whether individual compliers or companies in exemption schemes, are matched with reprocessers producing recycling certificates. We need a requirement that only such certificates are acceptable evidence of compliance, and that such certificates will be issued only for a company's obligation tonnage in each material for which it has an obligation. The objective of the proposals would be to prevent expensive cross-material subsidy and to prevent small and medium companies being put at a competitive disadvantage by restricting access to their own waste products. The purpose would simply be to restore the pre-eminence of the shared approach principle, in which the Government claim to believe but which they have done nothing to prevent being undermined. It would also strengthen the position of Valpak as a multi-sector scheme, which we should like to consolidate.

I therefore give notice that an incoming Labour Government will seek an early review of the regulations to find the best means of securing those objectives. That is very much in line with the proposals set out in early-day motion 299, which has now been signed by more than 95 hon. Members from both sides of the House.

I appreciate that that is only an interim solution and that longer-term solutions must await a more thorough review by the advisory committee or an equivalent body. Several such longer-term questions need to be asked. First, is waste minimisation being sufficiently encouraged? That is not directly addressed in the regulations, except in the sense that less packaging means less obligation. Secondly, would it be sensible to have a split target—one that maximises recovery of commercial and industrial waste, which is relatively clean and easy to collect—and then add to that a separate domestic stream target? Thirdly, do the regulations sufficiently encourage re-use or positively discourage it?

There are other concerns, too. Hon. Members will know that local authorities have made forceful complaints. They are disturbed that they will be placed in a subordinate position to the private sector, especially where retailers set up rival schemes. The local authority recycling advisory committee has let it be known that retailers will threaten existing recycling infrastructures if they take control of car park schemes and reduce the viability of local collection rounds.

Despite all those substantial reservations about the regulations, I repeat that the Opposition strongly support the general principle of increasing recovery and recycling of packaging waste. Indeed, one might argue that the regulations do not go far enough. Under the regulations, Britain aims to recycle only fractionally over a quarter of our packaging—virtually the minimum allowed under the EU directive. By contrast, Germany—if I dare to quote a more successful country, without necessarily supporting the mechanism that it uses—already recycles more than three quarters, and the Netherlands recycles half.

Furthermore, we need to set targets to reduce packaging. Over the past year, packaging in Germany has decreased by 12 per cent. while in this country, INCPEN, the Industry Council for Packaging and the Environment, predicted a 4 per cent. increase in food packaging between 1993 and 2000. Despite all our reservations, we do not want further delays in view of the short time scales within which the recovery and recycling targets must be met. Further delays would only increase uncertainty in the industry and further undermine Valpak's viability. We are therefore content to allow the regulations through, but on the strict understanding that they will require urgent review along the lines that I have made clear.

4.58 pm

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): That was a rather muddled speech from the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). He was on strong ground when he expressed the valid concerns widely held outside the House about the possible advantages to the retail sector, but he spoilt his speech with his extraordinary and excessive abuse of the Secretary of State, and his failure to understand that the scheme has the great advantage—there are disadvantages, which I shall deal with—of having been developed in co-operation between Government and industry.

By expressing criticism, the hon. Gentleman was criticising those many people to whom he also paid tribute. He went on to promise a review, which we all

[Sir Roger Moate]

welcome, but the Minister said that there would be a continuous process of review, even before the implementation of the regulations. There are strong points to be made, but the hon. Gentleman was rather muddled, and spoilt the strength of his case.

I am sorry that the debate is to be so short, as it is of enormous importance. I shall try to be brief. The paper mills in my constituency recycle about 1 million tonnes of paper a year, and there is a steel mill that recycles 1 million tonnes of scrap metal every year, so I can claim that we are in the forefront of UK recycling.

Years ago, as many hon. Members who had paper mills in their constituency knew, the paper industry was in decline. In recent years it has become a growth industry. That is because, previously, the industry was entirely dependent on imported raw materials—pulp. Now there has been massive new investment. More than £500 million has been invested in north Kent alone, protecting thousands of jobs and worth billions of pounds to UK Ltd. in terms of import saving. All that has happened because now we have our own indigenous raw material—recycled paper. There has been an industrial revolution, and it is quite an exciting story. It is estimated that the paper industry wants another 2 million tonnes a year to support further investment.

As well as that strong constituency interest, I must declare my interest as parliamentary adviser to the Paper Federation of Great Britain. I am also one of those who believe passionately in the need for the UK to achieve maximum recycling of waste materials—paper and board, glass, metal and plastics—as raw materials for further industrial production. By that I do not mean incineration in large-scale, expensive, subsidised waste-to-energy power stations.

With that belief I, like almost everyone else, warmly welcome the aim of the measure. It might therefore sound churlish to use this occasion to express serious concerns about the regulations. We have been told that we currently recover just over 2 million tonnes out of 8 million tonnes of packaging waste. The target is to raise that to almost 4 million tonnes in about three years. That is an ambitious target. We must find a way of using an additional 2 million tonnes of recycled waste materials. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Minister and with the hon. Member for Oldham, West that we had to avoid the system adopted by the Germans and the massive disruption caused to the market by the green point system. We had to avoid such a radical and sudden change in the system.

It was right to welcome the principles on which the Government embarked—to work with industry to develop a scheme for shared responsibility among all parts of the packaging chain. There should be no cross-subsidy between different packaging materials. The scheme was to be worked up co-operatively with industry. I pay tribute to the work done by the Secretary of State, and to many leaders of industry, who worked extremely hard over a period of years, giving up a massive amount of management time to produce the scheme.

However, I wonder whether all those who worked so hard envisaged the outcome—38 pages of mind-boggling regulations. I do not believe that that is what they had in mind. The Minister told us that 4,000 businesses must comply this year. In 2000, 9,000 businesses will have to comply. A recent survey showed that two out of three businesses are not even aware that the new regulations will come into force. When those business men try to read the regulations, their eyes will not only glaze over, but be double-glazed over, because the regulations are extremely difficult.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Schedule 4 charts the great amount of detailed data required from companies, including the type of packaging. Does my hon. Friend agree that that will put a heavy burden on many companies, and that, in many cases, the cost and complexity of gathering all that information will be greater than that of complying with the VAT regulations?

Sir Roger Moate: I congratulate my hon. Friend on having got as far as schedule 4. As he said, not only are the regulations complex; they are costly. My hon. Friend the Minister referred to a cost of £270 million to £280 million. That is the lowest estimate that I have heard, and it does not surprise me that he should give us the lowest. We have heard other figures, between £300 million and £600 million, and up to £1 billion, as the compliance costs on British industry. Those costs will have to be met by British industry in a relatively short time, so we should not underestimate their seriousness. The scheme might be good value, and better value than other schemes, but we must understand that it will be introduced at great cost to British industry.

There was a meeting at the House in January with representatives of the British Fibreboard Packaging Association. Like me and everyone else, they support the aims of the measure. I quote their summary of the worries expressed by much of industry. They state:

> "Our main ares of concern are the burdensome complexity of the Regulations; their high cost; the risk that they will distort historical trade patterns and put UK industry at a competitive disadvantage to its EU counterparts; and, most importantly, that they may even reduce rates of recovery and recycling rather than increase them . . . Specifically, the draft regulations now allow any business with packaging waste on its own premises to use that waste to meet its recovery obligation at a much reduced cost compared to those businesses which have no waste arising."

It is understandable that such organisations should be concerned, as 75 per cent. of the product that their members manufacture is already recycled.

We also had representations, again expressing widespread concern, from the Association of Convenience Stores, which represents the owners and managers of 11,000 retail shops around the country. They, too, are worried that the cost of the proposals will fall disproportionately on small grocery businesses. People will ask how small shops can handle 50 tonnes of packaging material, which will be the requirement in the year 2000, but it takes only a small volume of glass to reach that level, so a group of shops might well fall in that category. We must take care to tailor the regulations correctly.

Why have all those concerns suddenly arisen, when we have had years to work up the regulations? I think that it is because of the sheer difficulty of translating into reality the splendid idea of shared responsibility. It is easy for a superstore, with masses of cardboard boxes at the back door and bottle banks at the front door, to meet its 47 per cent. obligation. However, a producer of cardboard boxes, who has no waste left on his premises, can discharge his obligation only by paying out hard cash.

I think that I am right in saying that about half of the 8 million tonnes of packaging waste ends up with the retailer. That gives the retailer a disproportionate amount of power. It is therefore all the more important that retailers should play a part in the co-operative arrangements.

Part of the problem is that the costs arise because we do not have outlets for all the waste materials. They currently have no market value. We must ensure that industrial demand is created for those raw materials as soon as possible, which would place a higher price on the materials, reduce compliance costs and might then make the regulations unnecessary. In the meantime, we must ensure that they operate as intended. Bureaucracy should be kept to a minimum and everyone in the chain, including the major retailers, should co-operate to ensure that the system works. One estimate is that, under the present arrangements, the paper packaging industry alone would subsidise other packaging materials to the tune of £45 million a year. That cannot be fair.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to assure the industry that the regulations will work as originally intended. I urge him to repeat his promise of a review in order to meet the challenge posed by the hon. Member for Oldham, West. The regulations must be reviewed before they come into effect to ensure that they will work fairly. We have time: my hon. Friend has said that we are gathering information. Let us use that information to allay the fears that have been expressed. Will my hon. Friend confirm also that he expects the larger retail groups to enter into the spirit of the new Valpak and other co-operative arrangements to ensure that the burden does not fall unfairly on other sectors? Will he reiterate his assertion that the large retailers will not be able to use their surpluses of waste paper materials, such as corrugated paper, to subsidise their obligations regarding other categories of waste materials, such as glass and metals?

I sincerely hope that we shall not create a new, artificial market for waste certificates that is backed up by a large bureaucracy, as occurred with milk quotas. It is absolutely vital that, following the passage of the regulations—we welcome the measure—the new system should be scrutinised constantly to ensure that it leads eventually to a free market solution and not to a costly corporatist burden on British industry and the British people.

5.11 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Most of the remarks of the hon. Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate)—particularly the second half of his speech—supported what my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said. My hon. Friend said that there must be a partnership between Government and industry to ensure that the regulations are applied equitably and that changes are made if and when they prove necessary.

In Committee, it was intended that the Environmental Protection Bill should empower the Secretary of State to introduce regulations. I submitted an amendment on Report, insisting that the regulations should come before the House before they were applied. It is vital that we debate important issues such as this, but I believe that the regulations have taken too long to come to this place.

The House must approve the regulations if we are to meet the significant and tight targets set by the European Union, of 50 per cent. recovery and 25 per cent. recycling by 2001. The industry debated loud and long about finding an equitable basis for sharing the legal obligations across the packaging chain, and arrived at a compromise solution at its meeting on 15 December. The industry commenced consultations in 1993. The present regulations are not perfect but, as the Minister said, they must be passed tonight. They are pioneering measures.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for agreeing with most of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate), who spoke from his great experience in the paper and board industry. Should not the hon. Gentleman emphasise that we must not distort the market in respect of these regulations? It would be unfortunate if, as my hon. Friend said, certain large retailers were allowed to use their packaging to subsidise other areas of their recycling responsibility. That would have an unfair impact on other sectors of the paper and board industry.

Mr. O'Brien: I made that point when I intervened on the Minister. He assured me that the market shares the responsibility to collect or recycle certain materials within the recovery chain. I therefore assume that the issue has been resolved, and I shall address it only briefly in this debate.

We must ensure that all sectors of the industry have a common goal of minimising the total cost of the national recovery scheme. Agreement was reached on 15 December 1995 regarding the four principal areas of concern in the packaging chain: the packaging raw material manufacturers, the converters, the packer/fillers, and the retailers.

Agreement was reached on 15 December on the basis of a majority; it was not a unanimous decision. Concern has been expressed since that meeting, and it was comforting to hear the Minister confirm that the regulations are not set in stone and will be reviewed as and when that proves necessary. The purpose of shared responsibility is to reduce the likelihood of any one group being able to profit at the expense of the rest, thereby inflating the total cost of the scheme. That concern has been expressed on more than one occasion.

Mr. Sheerman: There is no wicked scenario: companies will make commercial judgments within their sectors. Unless there is regulation to control their activities, the issue will never be resolved fully and companies will continue, quite rightly, to pursue their particular commercial interests. We have a dog's breakfast of regulation because a dog's breakfast is better than no breakfast at all.

Mr. O'Brien: We must establish who will regulate the regulations. I believe that that is the duty of the Environment Agency, but the Minister and the Department must take some responsibility for ensuring that the regulations apply fairly and equally across the industry.

I remind the House that the all-party group on sustainable waste management has held many meetings to consider these issues and has listened to speakers representing all sides of the industry. We must address this controversial matter. The Minister's assurances are

[Mr. O'Brien]

encouraging, but we must ensure that he delivers on them. Some packaging manufacturers claim that the regulations are inequitable because retailers and supermarkets may carry an unfair and insufficient share of the obligations. Reference has been made to the involvement of retailers and their ability to use transit packaging, predominantly paper and board, to help to discharge their responsibilities. They could easily use the cardboard boxes and paper packaging in their back-yards to fulfil their obligations, whereas, in many instances, those materials should be returned to the supplier in order to distribute the responsibility fairly throughout the industry. Some of the supermarket chains could offset their responsibilities without joining a multi-material collection scheme.

In an Adjournment debate that I secured on 15 January, I suggested that the number of companies excluded from the regulations must be kept to a minimum and that all businesses, people and commercial undertakings involved with packaging must be encouraged to join Valpak or some such scheme. Time will tell whether the £5 million cut-off point is satisfactory. It must be stressed that the regulations should not be a burden on small businesses and that it will be in their interests to join a collective industrial scheme to ensure that their legal obligations are met. The Minister referred to registration. I think that it would be more economical for small businesses to come together for legal advice and in other situations that could develop in the industry.

It is paramount that all kinds of waste must be included in recovery and recycling principles. I refer particularly to plastic and glass. If we are not careful with the regulations, some businesses might have to pick up the most expensive part of recycling and recovery while others will achieve their targets at the least expense. Wood in packaging will also have to be addressed—if not today, in future. That matter was raised in the Adjournment debate, but it has not been settled. As a matter of fact, we have not yet had an interpretation of packaging. The Advisory Committee on Packaging will have to address that, too. Some retailers may find paper and board easier to recover than other materials, and I hope that the advisory committee will monitor that. It must also ensure that the directive's targets, implemented by the regulations, are achieved in a free-market scenario.

The Minister referred to the legislation as pioneering. There may therefore be some conflict in the application of the directive in the market. It would be helpful if the advisory committee were to publish a report from time to time on how the industry is going under the regulations. Is that within its responsibilities? If so, how often could it publish such reports? Would they be available to hon. Members in the Library or the Vote Office?

If the industry is to achieve its goal, it must do so without imposing excessive costs. Reference has been made to some parts of the industry having to meet excessive costs of £40 million or £45 million. Indeed, packaging recovery in some European Union member states has carried excessive costs. The German scheme has been mentioned. I am advised that, in Germany and Austria, citizens pay about £20 a year in inflated product costs so that certain targets can be reached. That point was made in exchanges earlier. The Government are suggesting a cost to United Kingdom citizens of between £5 and £11 a head a year. If such a target is set, a monitoring exercise must be undertaken to report on progress in achieving it. We should receive progress reports on how the advisory committee is viewing the legislation and the regulations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell–Savours), who was in his place at the beginning of the debate but had to leave, asked me to pass to the Minister a number of questions from his mailbag. Due to the shortness of the debate, I shall not read them out.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: If I hear from the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell–Savours), I shall be delighted to try to assist him in any way I can.

Mr. O'Brien: I am sure that that will meet my hon. Friend's concern. He had to leave to attend a Committee, so I said that I would make the points on his behalf.

I support the regulations, but stress that hon. Members who have an interest in the way in which they work out before the two-year period ends should be provided—if not directly, through the Library—with progress reports from the advisory committee.

5.24 pm

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) has been hearing from small businesses. I have the honour of being chairman of the all-party retail industry group. My hon. Friends will be aware that, under the regulations—the hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) referred to it—retailers have 47 per cent. of the recovery obligations. With the packers and fillers, that comes to 83 per cent. of the responsibility for recovery of packaged waste.

The British Retail Consortium, the Food and Drink Federation and the alcoholic drinks industry have issued a joint statement in support of the regulations. A number of distinguished members of the all-party sustainable waste management group have worked over the years on how we are to survive, given our packaging methods, and how we are to achieve recovery and recycling. Whatever criticisms and concerns are expressed, everybody must support the regulations. My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham referred to small businesses in the retail industry. I should like to make two points about them.

I, too, have had correspondence with the Association of Convenience Stores which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham said, comprises 1,500 retail member companies. It supports almost 11,000 local stores and 101,000 employees. The association is very worried that the regulations will be a burden on its members. Although businesses that handle less than 50 tonnes of packaging waste a year or have annual turnovers of less than £5 million will be exempt until 2000, the threshold will then be lowered to a turnover of £1 million. In today's market, that is not such a sum, and it could be achieved by a fairly small business. Some concern has been expressed by small retailing groups that burdens will bear disproportionately on small retailers.

The British Retail Consortium has been undertaking some research to try to correlate the financial turnover in different kinds of retailing businesses with the amount of packaging handled by such sectors. Not much research at present helps small retailers in that respect. If the BRC

research indicates that unnecessary burdens will be experienced by small retailing businesses, it will provide the advisory committee with details so that the committee can consider the appropriateness of changing the threshold.

Although I am reassured in part by the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister about the continuing review, I hope very much that he will emphatically reassure small retailing businesses that the threshold particularly will be one of the factors that are taken into account by the Advisory Committee on Packaging during the two-year period when it considers the burdens that will be placed on the smaller sections of the retailing business.

5.29 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): The regulations aim to achieve the dual objective of a continuing improvement in our recycling capacity without harming our competitiveness. That can be achieved, but in seeking a balance between regulation and a free market we are bound to have problems.

At some stage, the Government should say, "This is the objective, and we have to achieve it." I believe that much of the delay has been caused by the difficulty of getting full agreement, given that everyone in the sector is competing for an advantage in the market. I am not criticising any of the players for the delays and the difficulties. I would rather that regulations were laid today than we had no regulations at all. I back my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on that point.

We must ensure that the regulations remain on course. When I mentioned the Environment Agency in my intervention, it was not a disparagement or a criticism. We must ensure that the agency is fully equipped and resourced to carry out its policing and auditing role. Many of us who are interested in this area, and many in the private sector who will be affected by the regulations, do not want to criticise the Environment Agency, but we want to know whether it has the necessary resources.

There is a parallel with the Environment Trust, which was established by the same Secretary of State for the Environment. The problem was whether, with only a chairman and a part-time secretary, it could deliver a system that worked. The evidence up to now is that they are having great difficulties making the system work. I put that in the Minister's mind, although by the time anything happens, the changes will be made by a Minister with a different political complexion.

It is important for industry to know that we are on track to achieve the two objectives: good recycling and meeting targets. Unless we are geared up, I suspect that we shall not meet the targets for the end of the century. We should develop expertise in this country, which we could sell to the rest of the world. There is a great market in waste management. It requires an understanding of the pressures and the best ways of using the different technologies—not just recycling—to tackle the problems of waste management in a sophisticated urban economy. That is a great challenge and we could have a competitive advantage over other European countries. We must seize that advantage and find the right balance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West has never been a great admirer of the German system, but he believes in a good regulatory regime. All of us who know anything about this business know that the right balance is to have a good regulatory regime and to listen to the private sector, which ultimately has to make a profit.

5.33 pm

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the Whips who assist us had calculated that I would be speaking slightly later. I apologise for the delay. *[Interruption.]* I did not hear the Minister, who made a remark from a sedentary position. I congratulate my hon. Friends on their important contributions to the debate, which were based on knowledge of the subject and were supportive of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher).

The draft regulations in the European directive have satisfied no one. There has been enormous delay in bringing them to the House. As we have heard from Members on both sides of the House, the regulations contain nothing that we can wholly praise. As my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said, we are left with a dog's breakfast which we have had to acknowledge is better than no breakfast at all.

The Minister made much of the consultation that the Government have had with industry. My hon. Friend rightly criticised that consultation as being incomplete and imperfect. It excluded the other obvious players in the field: the whole of the waste management industry, local government and the voluntary sector. It is not reasonable to consult and pursue ideas about regulations on packaging without involving those important key players.

Under these arrangements, the retailer may displace existing local authority schemes and efforts. The provisions will not lead to a new recycling tonnage, and could affect the economies of scale that local authorities are able to make. That is enormously important: Labour local authorities have been at the forefront of recycling, albeit at the low levels that we have achieved in Britain.

The Minister said that it was important to use market mechanisms, and that only the markets could deliver. The arrangements in the directive are unlikely to lead to the creation of those markets. The producer responsibility mechanism is almost wholly geared to generating or rearranging the supply side of recycling. A number of Conservative Members represent the paper and board industry. They will know that the newsprint recycling industry is already suffering from a glut. What is needed is not just a rearrangement of the supply side, but the setting of post-consumer recycled content quotas which would ensure effective markets. Nothing that the Minister has said leads us to believe that that will happen.

Throughout the regulations, there is little interest in creating markets for recycled goods. More significantly, there is a lack of any mechanism for waste reduction. The Minister said that the Government's intention—I hope that I quote him accurately—is to minimise the amount of packaging produced and to encourage as much re-use as possible. Neither I nor any of the expert commentators whom I have consulted have been able to find where in the regulations those mechanisms are established. Indeed, the regulations are likely to legitimise the status quo by encouraging increases in waste overall, even though the percentage recycling target may be achieved.

I want to comment on European comparisons. Much has been made of the system in Germany, which has been vilified. We all acknowledge the difficulties and the lack

[Ms Joan Ruddock]

of appropriate markets created in advance of the arrangements. Virtually every other European nation is ahead of the United Kingdom in the packaging sector. In every type of packaging material, the leaders usually recycle at least twice the amount recycled in Britain, so there is no room for complacency in regard to packaging regulations.

In view of the short time at our disposal, I shall not repeat the points made by my hon. Friends. A little humility from Ministers would not go amiss, given the massive delays in the United Kingdom's compliance with the European directive. No one is satisfied, either in the House or outside. We shall not oppose the regulations as we know that in government we shall be able to revise them in the interests of business and the community at large.

5.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): With the exception of the contribution from the Opposition Front Bench, the debate has produced what I regard as a wide measure of agreement and a warm welcome for the scheme. It involves the important principles of producer responsibility, shared responsibility throughout industry and dialogue between Government and industry, which we have been keen to see throughout the whole process. That has resulted in what we consider to be a low-cost, efficient approach to waste recovery which combines a light regulatory touch with deterrence to those who seek a free ride.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State was right to say at the outset that these are pioneering regulations. We shall need to listen to the concerns that are expressed to us as the regulations unfold, and it was for that purpose that we established the Advisory Committee on Packaging under Sir Peter Parker. I am sure that the committee will want to take on board many of the views expressed today by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate), who drew attention to the great success of the paper industry in recent times, made some important points. I believe that he was particularly enlightened in stressing the great advantage of the scheme: the fact that it was developed through co-operation between Government and industry. That is a fundamental point. As for the points of detail on which my hon. Friend sought reassurance, I believe that I can give him that reassurance. As I have said, we shall keep the process under review and we shall require information before the regulations are implemented. This year will be devoted to the gathering of information and registration and the regulations will come into force in 1998-99.

My hon. Friend also mentioned larger retailers. My hon. Friend the Minister of State said a little about that in his opening speech. I emphasise again that we expect large retailers to be part of the collective schemes and to play their part in them. We think it unlikely that large retailers will be able to come anywhere near fulfilling the whole of their obligation—which, as has been said, amounts to 47 per cent.—through the waste collected at their back door; we believe that they will therefore find it necessary to join a collective scheme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham raised the question of material cross-subsidy. One of the criteria against which applications for schemes will be considered for registration by the Environment Agency is the minimisation of the potential for such cross-subsidy. That will be an important consideration during the competitive scrutiny of prospective compliance schemes. I hope that I can reassure my hon. Friend further by revealing to him the attitude of Sir Peter Parker, who has said in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that he considers it

"important to ensure that all sectors play an equitable part in relation to the domestic waste stream".

I am sure that Sir Peter will approach his chairmanship of the advisory committee very much in that spirit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham was concerned about small businesses, as was my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner). They will know of the thresholds applying to small businesses. There is a turnover threshold of £5 million, rising to a £1 million threshold by the year 2000. We shall be keen to listen to the voice of small business, as I am sure the advisory committee will be as well.

In a balanced and authoritative speech, the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) also rightly emphasised the need for co-operation and the need for all four principal parties in the waste chain to be involved. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) made what I interpreted to be a not entirely unwelcoming speech. Given that background, it is a shame that Opposition Front Benchers had to resort to nit picking. They expressed their confidence in the outcome of the election, which is something of a ritual for Opposition parties. I believe that the result will be the same as it has been on so many occasions in the past, but I must tell the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) that I also believe that if his dreams were to come true and his party were to form a Government, the hiving-off process that he envisages would be overtaken by another process of hiving off which might affect the hon. Gentleman himself. Certainly, we do not regard it as hiving off—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14B(1).*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

Elections (Candidates' Expenses)

5.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville): I beg to move,

That the draft Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 11th February, be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I understand that with this, it will be convenient to discuss the following motion.

That the draft Local Elections (Variations of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 12th February, be approved.

Mr. Sackville: On occasion, the Government propose to the House that we upgrade the limits for money that can be spent by candidates at local and parliamentary elections. That has normally happened every two years, but, partly as a result of the very low inflation that the Government have achieved, it has happened after three years on this occasion. The limits will be increased by 6.95 per cent.

I have racked my brains as to what else can be said on the subject, but I have failed to find anything, so I shall limit myself to commending the orders to the House.

5.45 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I am not sure whether the Minister was complaining that he could not rack any more, or whether he had done too much racking and could not find anything; but the House will have heard what he said.

It does not surprise me that the Government wish to nod the order through promptly. I do not intend to speak for long, but it must be said that the public expect some transparency in the way in which we deal with election funding. The order is important, because it regulates the amount of funding that any candidate who contests the next general election, or elections in Northern Ireland, can spend. It is important for that to be dealt with on the Floor of the House, where a little more attention is paid to the matter than might be the case in Committee—although not much more, I suspect, looking around the Chamber.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): The Minister could find very little to say, because he could not or would not address the fact that room for manoeuvre is very restricted. If we were able, as we are not, to talk about the £40 million war chest that the Tories have obtained from devious sources, and are going to use—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is right: he is totally out of order.

Mr. Henderson: I am rather glad that I took that intervention, and learned the mood of the House. I might otherwise have been tempted to move a little further than the precise terms of the order.

The Opposition support the order. We recognise the need to uprate the amount of money that candidates can spend in line with inflation. Nevertheless, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg your indulgence so that I may comment on some of the inadequacies of the order. It deals only with expenditure at local level in electioneering.

Nowadays—in contrast to the days, 50 years ago or more, when Parliament first drew up orders such as this—the expenditure incurred by a local candidate pales into insignificance compared with the amount incurred by parties nationally in a general election campaign. It seems to me a little crazy that we can examine only the expenditure that a candidate can incur at a local level, and cannot consider how much is incurred by his political party at national level.

Hon. Members will make their own judgment on how any political party can best get its general election message over. Some may believe that it is still more effective to tramp around the streets, knock on doors or charm the locals in a club, but others—I include myself in this category—think otherwise. We recognise the importance of those factors, but by-elections are different, in that only a small margin of votes may be at stake, with a large effort concentrated on them. In a general election, that kind of campaigning, which is relatively cheap, is not so effective, and does not influence public opinion in the same way as the bashing of political parties on billboards, direct mailing—which is very expensive—or saturation propaganda in newspaper advertisements.

If we believe that that second group of factors has become more and more important in persuading people in our political system, it strikes me as logical that regulations governing the amount that any political party can spend in an election should also focus on the ability of parties to raise funds for campaigning purposes.

I am told by Library staff that a candidate can spend an average of £8,000. There were 651 candidates at the last general election, which means that the total was £65.2 million. That pales into insignificance compared with the war chest of £40 million which this morning's newspapers tell us the Conservative party will have at its disposal in the election. The House needs to conduct a review of the way that political parties and elections are funded. It is not enough to regulate what is happening locally, although that is important. It is crucial to look beyond that, at how public opinion is influenced and how political parties raise funds to influence public opinion.

The British people would not want rich people similar to Ross Perot in America, Berlusconi in Italy—*[Interruption.]*—or Sir James Goldsmith, as the Government Whip mutters—because it is not right that those who are phenomenally rich should be able to build up a political party and move into the political spectrum with virtually no support among the people. The vast majority of people will not agree with that, and that is why they will fully support a review of the regulations.

It is not possible at this time, eight weeks before a general election, to undertake a major review of the matter, but the next Parliament should look not only at how political parties are regulated and how much expenditure they can incur locally, but at national provisions as well. That is the way to ensure long-term democracy, and the British people will expect serious politicians to support it.

Like the Minister, I have trawled my brains on the order. I support it, because the change is necessary. However, it is also necessary for the House to signal a long-term review of the funding of political parties and

[Mr. Henderson]

election campaigns, to make sure that the public and democracy are protected and that the rich cannot just move in and buy political power.

5.52 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The order is nonsense. I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) said. Everybody understands that election thresholds should be valorised each year. The last variation order was presented on 13 March 1994, and this one simply catches up with the increase in the retail prices index over that time. If everybody accepts that inflation should be reflected in the base limit for expenses for candidates, why not recognise that in the RPI and amend the 1983 legislation so that, as a new electoral register is produced each February, the RPI will automatically calculate a new threshold limit for expenses?

It is a complete waste of parliamentary time for a poor Minister to have to sit in a darkened room and rack his brains, although goodness knows what that must look like. Even the official Opposition spokesmen have trouble trying to find something to say. I say "snap" to that. Why do we do it? Why not have annual RPI uprating for the new register each February? That would spare us the agonies to which Ministers and Opposition spokesmen are subjected.

5.53 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I was tempted to oppose the order after studying it in detail. We are debating an important subject. What could be more important to democrats than the representation of the people? One of the finest aspects of our electoral system is the tight control of expenditure by candidates. Members of other legislatures, such as that in the United States, look with a mixture of astonishment and admiration at our system, and at the tight control of how much each candidate can spend in an election.

You are a well-travelled Member, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you will know that, under the United States' system, there is no limit on what a candidate can spend. One of the great dangers of the US system and those of many other countries is that a very wealthy person can almost purchase votes because of the intensity of his campaign. That is especially the case if the ability to spend is linked to the ability to buy television and radio time. Hon. Members can count their blessings not only that is there a strict limit on individual expenditure but that, nationally, there is a strict attitude to political broadcasts on radio and television. Long may that continue and prosper.

The one issue in the order that impinges directly on representation of the people is that each candidate is restricted to expenditure of £8,000. But a party with enough money to take all the billboards in my constituency and all the advertising space in my local paper makes nonsense of that by undermining the legislation. By taking space on billboards alone, that party can double the allowable expenditure for each candidate. That faces me, and I have perhaps one of the best, well-oiled electoral machines in the country. Huddersfield Labour party has no equal in the land for membership and commitment, and it uses every modern technique to maintain Labour's majority. I have no concerns on that score.

My constituency is surrounded by marginal seats, but the Conservative party will spend so much in my constituency, to which many people come from outlying constituencies for shopping and entertainment, that it will dwarf my £8,000. In the election campaign, possibly £50,000 will be spent on poster sites alone and another £100,000 will be spent on advertising. Given that reality, the order is nonsense.

In a full debate on the nature of our democracy and on the impact of the representation of the people legislation, we would examine in detail not only the principles but the fact that the system is unfair to parties with fewer resources than others. That comes down to the grass-roots issue of one candidate having an unequal chance against other candidates. I fear that that will go on, because we have allowed a great difference.

When I entered politics, I stood for my first seat, in 1974, in Taunton. At that time, not only was expenditure much lower, but the propensity for big poster campaigns and national advertising, even by the Conservative party, was far less pronounced. Now I read of £40 million, and of more money flooding in from China and the far east and from all kinds of dubious sources to the Conservative coffers, and I fear that that will lead to the undermining of our electoral system.

I am not surprised that, before this important debate, the Minister sat in a dark room scratching his head and thinking of something to say. He does not care about our parliamentary democracy, but the Opposition do.

5.59 pm

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I speak somewhat earlier than I had expected, after the Minister's sparkling introduction.

The orders are the result of the periodic review of election expenses and, as has been stated, could hardly be more straightforward, particularly the Northern Ireland one. As the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) pointed out, they are the product of an almost automatic process, and are before us this evening to ensure that they have effect in time for the electoral festivities, which are but a few weeks away.

The Northern Ireland order merely repeats exactly the provision for the rest of the United Kingdom according to the different procedure. I did have a couple of questions, assuming that a Minister with responsibility for Northern Ireland might be here. Although one is not, I shall read them anyway, and perhaps the Minister could arrange for the responses to be sent on.

Mr. Sackville *indicated assent.*

Mr. Dowd: I see the Minister nodding. I am grateful for that.

The questions relate to giving some indication of when and how the other remaining regulations relevant to elections in Northern Ireland—the Representation of the People Act (Amendment) Regulations and the Northern Ireland Local Elections (Amendment) Regulations—will be processed. If I could have that information, I should be grateful.

Despite the slight lapse into hyperbole by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), I am sure that the Huddersfield Labour party is an

excellent fighting machine. It is certainly a consistently successful one, as his presence here this evening and over many years representing Huddersfield testifies, but he strikes at some pertinent points. The limitations for expenses are a fiction, because they control nothing but individual candidate expenses.

To some degree, the whole legislative framework under which we operate our elections, both parliamentary and local, fails to recognise anything other than candidates. It fails to recognise the existence even of political parties and the machinery they have, whether they are genuine political parties or the inventions of rich individuals.

Although the order calculates in considerable detail the theoretical maxima allowed to be spent by individual candidates at the general election, the whole world knows that they give little indication of the amounts that will actually be spent, particularly during a general election. Taking the 362 county constituencies and the 297 borough constituencies in the UK at the time of the next election, and an average electorate of about 67,000, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) said, that would imply maximum expenditure of £5.5 million in total, if a party were to contest every seat in the UK, and I do not think that that is entirely probable.

However, it is authoritatively reported that Sir James Goldsmith, the well-known grocer who has been mentioned, plans to spend some £20 million on his Europhobic adventure at the general election. In addition, today we have read reports, again alluded to already—I will not elaborate on them, lest I incur your wrath, Mr. Deputy Speaker—of £40 million from a variety of highly dubious sources being deployed by the Conservative party in a frenzied last-ditch effort to buy an election that it richly deserves to lose.

Only one small part of that money will appear on official returns to returning officers—although it is a failed effort, anyway—but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North has already stated, the whole issue of party funding is a source of continuing scandal and shame to the Tory party. Our action to date in refusing donations from overseas nationals and in revealing the source of all donations of more than £5,000, together with our commitment to review the regulations governing the funding of political parties, stands in marked contrast to the Tory party's disreputable conduct in this matter, where we have also witnessed the questionable use of official overseas visits, paid for by taxpayers, to raise money for the Conservative party.

Mr. Sheerman: Did my hon. Friend read the reports in the McAlpine memoirs this morning that the Prime Minister himself played an active role in that fund-raising activity?

Mr. Dowd: I did indeed, as did many other people. The revelations by the former treasurer of the Conservative party—this is not just some minion at central office, but the person who was responsible for spearheading the fund-raising campaign—add to the shame and scandal that attach to the Conservative party. It is grossly out of touch with public sentiment. The public want more openness, transparency and honesty in relation to the funding of political parties and where those funds come from.

We cannot oppose the orders. They are self-evidently sensible. As I have said, I have great sympathy with the point of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire about whether this is the best use of parliamentary time, given that all we are doing is taking the last orders and multiplying the figures by the retail prices index. The House can be confident that, if the British people give us the opportunity in a few weeks' time to form the Government, the Labour party will take the whole question of party political funding far more seriously than the Government ever have.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 11th February, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Local Elections (Variations of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 12th February, be approved.—[*Mr. Sackville.*]

Directors' Emoluments

6.5 pm

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): I beg to move,

That the draft Company Accounts (Disclosure of Directors' Emoluments) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 6th February, be approved.

The Companies Act 1985 requires all companies registered in Great Britain to provide information on directors' remuneration in the notes to their annual accounts. The information that companies are required to provide is set out in schedule 6 to the Act. The purpose of the disclosure is to permit shareholders and other users of the accounts to satisfy themselves that the directors, in setting their remuneration, are acting reasonably.

The Government believe that a statutory disclosure requirement continues to be necessary for all companies to safeguard the interests of shareholders. The purpose of the regulations is to bring the schedule 6 requirements into line with best practice in this sector, as set out in the recommendations of the study group on directors' remuneration chaired by Sir Richard Greenbury.

Hon. Members will recall that the Greenbury study group was asked to make recommendations on the determination and disclosure of directors' remuneration and to prepare a code of practice for use by the United Kingdom's larger listed companies. When the report was published in July 1995, it was welcomed by the Government as a very helpful contribution towards improving the accountability of directors to their shareholders. We particularly welcomed the report's emphasis on aligning the interests of directors and shareholders by linking pay to performance.

The Greenbury report focused on listed companies and its main recommendations were aimed at listed companies, investor institutions and the London stock exchange. Its key recommendation on disclosure of directors' remuneration was that a report should be sent to shareholders each year explaining the company's approach to executive remuneration and providing full disclosure of all elements in the remuneration of individual directors. The London stock exchange incorporated that recommendation into its listing rules in December 1995.

The Greenbury report also made two specific recommendations to the Government on disclosure of directors' remuneration: that the Government should remove from companies that make full disclosure of their directors' remuneration the obligation to show it in £5,000 bands and that the Government should review the present requirements for disclosure of information on directors' pensions. The regulations implement both recommendations. They also meet the commitment given to the House by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade that the provisions in the Companies Act relating to disclosure of directors' remuneration would be amended so that they were consistent with the listing rules.

The regulations lay down a basic disclosure rule, which is set at a level appropriate for unlisted companies, leaving it to the listing rules to require more detailed disclosures by listed companies. For example, the regulations require disclosure of aggregate emoluments and those of the highest-paid director, whereas the listing rules require disclosure of the remuneration of each director.

The Government accept that it would not be appropriate for unlisted companies, whose shares are not publicly traded, to be subject to the very detailed disclosure recommended for listed companies by the Greenbury report. This applies particularly to very small companies, where frequently all the shareholders are also directors of the company; indeed, the regulations propose a specific exemption from many of the disclosure requirements for such companies.

I deal now with the details of the new disclosure requirements in the regulations. The first substantive regulation covers the aggregate emoluments of directors. The new provisions retain the present requirement on all companies to show the aggregate amount of directors' remuneration, but they follow the Greenbury recommendations by requiring companies to provide information on each element of directors' remuneration.

Companies are therefore required to disclose figures on basic pay, annual bonuses, share options, long-term incentive schemes and company contributions to money purchase pension schemes. This will provide more useful information to readers of company accounts by allowing them to see how companies structure their directors' remuneration packages, but should not mean extra work for companies since the individual figures are needed to compile the overall total.

The second substantive regulation relates to the disclosure of the emoluments of the highest-paid director. The regulations raise the aggregate emoluments threshold for disclosure from £60,000 to £200,000. The threshold of £200,000 relates not to the pay of the highest-paid director but to the pay of the board as a whole. Nevertheless, such an increase will be welcome to many private businesses whose directors do not earn huge amounts, while continuing to catch the very highly paid.

Companies in which aggregate emoluments total £200,000 or more will be required to provide a breakdown of the highest-paid director's remuneration. We have, however, dropped the requirement to show the emoluments of the chairman when he is not the highest-paid director and the requirement to show the number of directors within each pay band of £5,000 since we do not believe that these disclosures provide users of the accounts with important information.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Why has the Minister reached that conclusion? It is extremely important that shareholders in larger companies and the wider public are fully informed about the entire structure of directors' remuneration. The Minister's proposal means that only in the case of the highest-paid director, where the aggregate emoluments exceed £200,000, will there be an individual disclosure. That individual disclosure could be vital in the case of company chairmen and, indeed, all company directors. That surely is the purpose of the stock exchange's insistence on such disclosures.

Mr. Taylor: As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the stock exchange asked for far more in relation to listed companies. Under the regulations, we try to achieve a disclosure requirement that is manageable for all corporations. The Companies Act and schedule 6 apply to all companies, and we want the general requirement to be appropriate to a small company and the stock exchange listing rules to be appropriate for listed companies. That seems to be the proper balance.

The general domestic law that we are debating goes further than European law. With regard to listed companies, Greenbury goes further than either and is to be implemented by the stock exchange to the extent that it goes further than the domestic law.

We do not believe that small companies should be put to a great deal of trouble in evaluating, say, a share option scheme where there is no trade in the share, but at least a reader of the accounts will be put on notice. In a case such as that to which the hon. Gentleman referred, if a shareholder reads the accounts and is startled by or dissatisfied with the emoluments of the highest-paid director, it is open to him to attend the annual general meeting and call for the chairman of the remuneration committee—this is also a requirement—to give information about others, too. I am sure that, in a well-ordered company, the chairman of that committee would do just that at the AGM.

Mr. Cousins: I am following the Minister's arguments extremely closely, but how many individual shareholders find their way to companies' AGMs, be those companies large or small? If a significant proportion of individual shareholders—leaving aside the institutional ones—were to find their way to companies' AGMs, those meetings would all have to be held in the Birmingham exhibition centre.

Mr. Taylor: It is not for me to give a general instruction or warning to or in any way coerce shareholders to attend AGMs; many will probably read the annual report and accounts and find that nothing in them motivates them to attend. However, if they are concerned and wish to ask a question, they can do so.

One of the most important improvements made by the regulations will be the disclosure of information on directors' pensions. The current disclosure rules require companies to include contributions paid in respect of directors under any pension scheme in their disclosure of directors' emoluments. Disclosing company contributions to money purchase schemes gives an accurate picture of the value to the director and the cost to the company of the benefits accrued. We have therefore retained the use of this figure in the regulations although, in line with our general policy that companies should disclose each element of directors' remuneration, we have required companies to disclose such contributions separately.

We do not believe, however, that the present disclosures are always meaningful in the case of defined benefit schemes—pension schemes—where the level of company contributions may be misleading if, for example, a contributions holiday is in force or the director has received a big pay rise and is close to retirement.

The regulations therefore simply require companies to disclose the number of directors who are accruing benefits under defined benefit schemes as a marker to users of the accounts. Companies where aggregate emoluments for the board total £200,000 or more are additionally required to disclose the accrued pension benefits of the highest-paid director.

The regulations underpin the listing rules on listed companies by setting out a basic rule that uses compatible definitions. With minor exceptions, listed companies will have to make only a single set of disclosures to comply with the Companies Act and the current stock exchange listing rules. The pension disclosure rules are a case in point.

The regulations and the listing rules will adopt a common policy in their treatment of the two types of pension scheme and will use compatible definitions. The listing rules will, however, build on the regulations by requiring listed companies to provide, in respect of defined benefit schemes, the amount of the increase over the financial year in each director's accrued benefit and either the transfer value of that increase or sufficient information to enable a reasonable assessment of the transfer value to be made. We believe that this is important information in respect of listed companies, but that it would not be appropriate in the case of unlisted companies. The shares of such companies are not widely held by the general public and it would be unreasonable to require them to employ an actuary to value pension entitlements for the purpose of the annual accounts.

The draft regulations follow the current statutory rules in requiring very small companies to provide information only to shareholders and not also to Companies House. In the case of the disclosure of directors' aggregate emoluments, small companies will be permitted to provide a single figure covering all types of remuneration, and will not be required to provide a breakdown by type of remuneration. Small companies do not have to provide information relating to the emoluments of the highest-paid director.

The regulations meet the Government's commitment to make the statutory disclosure rules on directors' remuneration consistent with the Greenbury recommendations. In doing so, they will provide more useful information to shareholders than is currently required without increasing the disclosure burden on companies. They deserve the support of the whole House.

6.19 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I am sure that the regulations will receive the support of the whole House, and that the serried ranks around us will, if need be, pour into the Division Lobby to support the Minister. I congratulate him on having mastered a complex measure, on giving the House the benefit of his knowledge and on the concise way in which he put his views to the House.

The Minister touched only briefly on the Greenbury report. The regulations are an attempt to remove the so-called overlaps between the Companies Act 1985 and the stock exchange's requirements, caused by its adoption of the Greenbury recommendations. However, according to a press release from the office of the President of the Board of Trade, dated 30 April 1996, the statutory instrument is designed to amend the Companies Act 1985 disclosure rules on directors' pay and pensions. Therefore, it does not simply remove so-called overlaps, but brings the requirements into line with the stock exchange listing rules—in other words, the requirements will be given full statutory backing, rather than the present self-regulatory backing of the stock exchange. The Government may talk of "overlap" or "underpin", but in reality they are putting on the statute book appropriate regulation dealing with directors' pay, pensions, share options and incentive schemes in line with the policies of the new Labour party.

The regulations apply to all companies, including listed companies, but the application of the rules will vary depending on whether the companies are listed, unlisted or small companies. In our view, however, the regulations

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

are needlessly complex as they seek to separate out self-regulation through the stock exchange listing requirements and statutory regulation through the Companies Act. The Government have come up with an instrument which, first, seeks to maintain self-regulation and secondly, introduces statutory regulation. That is what comes of not having a clear mind.

Easing administrative burdens, raising disclosure thresholds, dropping many existing obligations on unlisted companies, cutting the costs of disclosure and striking the right balance are all favoured objectives of the Department of Trade and Industry, but they can lead to complex regulations that obfuscate rather than clarify where the Government wish to go. The danger—the unforeseen consequence—is that it might be more difficult for shareholders to scrutinise what company directors are doing.

One result of the regulations will be to raise the bar for companies listed on exchanges other than the London stock exchange, and we welcome that. They will now have more stringent disclosure requirements, as they are to be put on a par with the requirements of the London stock exchange. Building on the Greenbury recommendations, the aggregate gains of directors of publicly listed companies, from share option schemes and long-term incentive plans, will have to be disclosed. Those for the highest-paid director will be disclosed separately.

The stock exchange listing rules require that the gains of each director under any share option scheme operated by a listed company be disclosed. However, unlisted companies do not have to disclose gain from share options or the value of any shares that directors have received under long-term incentive plans. That is said to be because of the difficulty in valuing shares of unlisted companies, but as Lord Haskel pronounced in another place, the Government had no difficulty in estimating a value for London Underground, which is not a quoted company. The Government themselves are the biggest customers of the financial consultants who specialise in the work of valuation.

It would not seem to be particularly onerous to lay down a framework for the valuation of shares in unlisted companies. The value of shares in unquoted companies does not elude the Inland Revenue when it comes to calculating their value for the purpose of inheritance tax. I am glad to see the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy in his place. His presence raises a smile among us all on a very dull Monday evening; it is always a pleasure to have him with us. I repeat that the value of shares can be and is calculated by the Inland Revenue for the purpose of inheritance tax. Difficulties there may be, but insuperable they are not. If the Minister wishes to intervene, I shall gladly give way.

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): The hon. Gentleman might agree that the calculation of the value of privately owned companies is an art form, rather than a science.

Mr. Bell: I agree, but having been a trustee of an estate, I can say that the Inland Revenue has means of calculating such values, and succeeds in doing so.

The unlisted company appears to have a further advantage. The current anonymous banded disclosure obligation is to be replaced by a simpler requirement to show a single figure—the aggregated emoluments paid to directors. At present, the salary of the highest-paid director must also be disclosed if aggregate emoluments exceed £60,000. That threshold will be raised to £100,000. The existing obligation to show the emoluments of the chairman separately if the chairman is not the highest-paid director is to be dropped, as is the requirement to show if any director has waived his emoluments.

Mr. Cousins: My hon. Friend, like me, represents a constituency in the north of England, where we have recently seen two of our major regional utility companies—Northumbrian Water and Northern Electric—taken over by foreign companies, one French and one American. They have now become subsidiaries of companies located outside Britain. Given that it is far from clear whether Northern Electric will continue to be listed, does he agree that the proposed changes in the regulations provide an incentive to de-list, which is wholly unhelpful to people in the north of England, who wish to know some of the proper details about the governance of companies such as Northern Electric? He will be aware that I have no hostility to American companies, which play a great part in our region.

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend, who has major American-owned companies such as Procter and Gamble in his constituency, makes two valid points. The first concerned whether the regulations cover subsidiary companies in this country, and the second was that although the regulations extend the stock exchange listing requirements to other stock exchanges in this country, they do not extend them to exchanges outside this country. The globalisation of our markets is reflected in the stock exchange, in that new exchanges such as Nasdaq are not covered by the rules. The Minister may wish to address the matter of whether the regulations cover subsidiary companies when he replies, or at a later stage.

The paradoxical effect of the changes would be to reduce the available information about directors' remuneration in unlisted companies. The aspects of the regulations that cover unlisted companies are contrary to the rules of transparency and accountability which everyone in the City agrees are elements of good corporate governance.

A propos small and medium-sized enterprises, I note that the regulations provide yet another definition of a small company. A small company may be defined as one that meets two of the following criteria: a turnover of not more than £2.8 million; a balance sheet total of not more than £1.4 million; or not more than 50 employees. We welcome simplification and disclosure exemptions for small companies. Moreover, the Government have not, as before, accidentally bound themselves in more red tape.

The Minister spent a little time talking about pensions, and I shall do the same. The replacement of paragraph 7 of schedule 6 to the 1985 Act is designed to force disclosure of discretionary increases in directors' pensions in excess of what they would have been entitled to, on the basis of their contributions or the fund's performance. He also mentioned Sir Richard Greenbury; we have not spent much time in the debate discussing him or his study group

on directors' remuneration, which published its recommendations on 17 July 1995. Sir Richard recommended that listed companies' remuneration committees should report each year to shareholders on behalf of the board, and that pension entitlements earned by each director during the year should be a part of that report.

According to the regulations, directors' pension benefits can be calculated on an accrued benefit basis. They also provide for the disclosure of sufficient information to calculate the capital value of directors' pensions if that information has not already been disclosed. Therefore, for listed companies, the current requirement to show aggregate pension contributions in respect of directors is to be altered. When the pension scheme is a defined contribution one, the company must show the number of directors covered by it, the aggregate contributions in respect of directors and the contribution for the highest-paid director. The Minister called that "underpinning".

The regulations' treatment of aggregation seems to be at odds with the stock exchange's listing rules. Moreover, there seems to be a logical defect at the regulations' heart. It is said to be too costly for companies to provide by name the amount of each element in the remuneration package of each director—although that is required by the stock exchange—and cheaper to aggregate than to provide figures for each director. However, as an aggregate can be arrived at only by adding together component parts—which must therefore be available and to hand—it is, if anything, more expensive to aggregate than to give legal force to the stock exchange requirements.

I have wandered down the byways of technicality, which is inevitable in so complicated an instrument. Moreover, the regulations deal with complex matters that may not be dealt with adequately on the Floor of the House. However, company pension schemes have massive tax advantages and privileges, which mean that the entire community contributes significantly to the private benefits that directors obtain through pension schemes. A significant slice of the £600 billion occupational pension scheme derives from the public purse because of tax exemptions. Therefore, there should be maximum transparency and accountability. Only time will tell—in the on-going debate on corporate governance and director and shareholder responsibility—whether the regulations meet those criteria.

At face value and on first examination, the regulations dealing with pension entitlement do not seem to be adequate. They fail to give full effect to the Greenbury recommendations on disclosure of the value of entitlements, and instead propose a simplistic statement on the amount of pension accrued yearly. There is also a danger that directors will be able to tuck away out of the sight of shareholders and employees—not to mention taxpayers—a huge part of their emoluments. As we shall see, in some cases, emoluments can amount to hundreds of thousands of pounds' worth of benefit.

The House is quiet today. In the run-up to a general election, it is good that most hon. Members are already out preparing for the dreaded day. However, Conservative Members who survive the electorate's relentless onslaught at the general election should not be surprised if a new Labour Government build on the regulations' legislative framework, on the basis of our commitments on corporate governance and of any recommendations produced by Sir Ronnie Hampel's review of the Greenbury and Cadbury recommendations.

Sir Ronnie Hampel is chairman of ICI, and he has agreed, on behalf of the Confederation of British Industry, to review the Greenbury and Cadbury recommendations. In the words of his brief, he is

"to ensure that the original purpose is being achieved, proposing amendments to and deletions from the Code as necessary."

The Hampel commission is expected to publish a draft report in July 1997, and a final report at the end of the year. However, for new Labour, the criterion will be enhancement of shareholder value in the framework of the stakeholder economy. The Hampel recommendations will be studied within that framework.

Our proposals are clear from our document "Vision for Growth", which was approved last autumn by party conference.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman has taken us into some very interesting territory—that new Labour, as he called it, will build on those controls. If indeed the Opposition want to go further—perhaps by implementing salary controls—now would be an absolutely ideal time to say so.

Mr. Bell: If I heard the Minister right, he is on about salary controls. He might explain to the House why there is such a vast difference in pay between directors of privatised utilities and those who work for them. He might also tell us why 160,000 people have lost their jobs in the privatised utilities since privatisation.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): If the hon. Gentleman is talking about pay differentials and implying that some of them are unjust, is he saying that he would legislate on them?

Mr. Bell: The hon. Gentleman tempts me into byways that, in the interest of brevity, I had not planned on travelling. Why does not the Minister tell us what he thinks of water company directors and senior managers who, since privatisation, have awarded themselves £24 million in executive share options? Why does he not mention the payments to those on the boards of National Power, PowerGen and National Grid, who, in 1994, were given £5.3 million—more than eight times the £646,000 paid to the board of the Central Electricity Generating Board before privatisation? Those figures must astonish the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall).

Mr. Marshall: Will the hon. Gentleman give a straight yes or no answer on whether he would legislate on those matters? If he would not legislate, why is he so willing to talk about them?

Mr. Bell: Talking about such matters on the Floor of the House is the essence of our parliamentary democracy. The regulations deal with aspects of corporate governance. Those aspects arise from the Greenbury recommendations, which were accepted by the former President of the Board of Trade, the current Deputy Prime Minister, who said that there would be legislation—which we are considering today. We are saying that we shall

[Mr. Bell]

build on the regulations, based on the Hampel commission's recommendations and on the consultation that we have conducted in the City of London.

Therefore, the answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Hendon, South is yes, a future Labour Government will build on the regulations, in the same terms as the regulations—*[Interruption.]* I can tell him that a Secretary of State in a new Labour Government will exercise the powers

"conferred on him"—

or her—

"by section 257 of the Companies Act 1985(a) and ... all other powers enabling him"—

or her—

"in that behalf"

to lay regulations before Parliament. So I not only give the hon. Gentleman a commitment that we shall build on the regulations' provisions on corporate governance, but I have told him the means by which we shall do it.

The clear proposals in our document "Vision for Growth" deal with the role of independent non-executive directors and with shareholder democracy. In response to the hon. Member for Hendon, South, an incoming new Labour Government

"will also give shareholders a greater effective say over remuneration packages granted to executives by giving them a legal right to vote on remuneration packages at the annual general meeting prior to implementation, as well as the right to re-elect the remuneration committee."

The role of institutional shareholders should also be enhanced. Merely encouraging or requiring institutional investors to vote is not by itself enough. The key issue is one of transparency in voting behaviour. That is why new Labour would require institutional shareholders to draw up and publish a clear code of conduct for their voting policy and to make available disclosure of their voting records.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Would the hon. Gentleman go so far as to make voting compulsory?

Mr. Bell: We shall, of course, await the recommendations of the Hampel commission; the Minister may find his answer in those recommendations. We shall consult the commission, but any changes that we feel should be made will be made not by primary legislation but, as I have told the Minister, by delegated legislation.

The Minister touched on the next issue briefly; Baroness Miller of Hendon also touched on it in a debate on Friday in the other place. I refer to the reason why we had Greenbury in the first place, which was the so-called fat cat syndrome. There was anxiety in the public mind about the huge amounts being paid to top directors and top chairmen.

I have a friendly remark for hon. Members who may be absent tonight because they are on the hustings already. I refer briefly to a statement made last week in the Wirral, South by-election. One voter, Mr. Keith Howard of Bebbington, who is a newsagent, said in an interview in the *Financial Times* that he was disillusioned with the way in which the Tories had allowed fat cat utility bosses to make huge personal fortunes while small business men had to struggle to make a living. He said:

"I voted Tory last time, but I am going to teach them a lesson in the by-election."

He added words that may be prophetic. He said:

"You never know, I might teach them a lesson in the General Election too."

The regulations are a very modest measure from a very modest Government. They are not in keeping with the changes in corporate governance, accountability and transparency for which the City of London is looking. To quote a little poem:

"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;

Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all."

On 2 May, this Government will be well and truly ground.

6.42 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): This matter is important and significant. It is disappointing that there should be so few hon. Members here to debate such an important matter. We have created a great mass of individual shareholders. New shareholders have sometimes been created as a result of privatisations; others have come about as a result of changes in the funding of pension schemes or the introduction of personal equity plans.

Investors in such schemes now take their responsibilities extremely seriously. We have the clearest possible sign of a new era of shareholder activism in which shareholders, however small their individual investment, intend to be active on matters that affect the control and governance of the company and on significant issues that affect, for example, environmental matters.

On his deathbed, Goethe uttered the phrase, "More light!" There has always been some confusion about what Goethe meant. Was he referring to something ontic, profound and philosophical, or to something mundane relating to the circumstances in which he found himself on his deathbed? In terms of the regulations, the issue of more light is both philosophical and practical.

I take a great deal of heart and comfort from what my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) said about the issue. He has given a clear sign that he regards the changes being made tonight as a modest and conditional advance at best, as a retreat in some important ways and as a range of matters that we shall have to revisit when we have the advantage of the Hampel report later this year. I very much welcome and take heart from that.

There have been enormous payment abuses in some of our great companies and institutions. It was as a result of those scandals and the loss of public trust in the governance of those companies that the Greenbury committee met to deal with directors' pay. That move began in the financial markets themselves.

Some of the things that the Minister has said tonight are inexplicable. How can aggregation be simpler than giving individual explanations of directors' and company chairmen's emoluments when, to arrive at an aggregate, one must have available the details of individual pay and benefits? The aggregate is a sum total. How can it be said that it is simpler to provide the aggregate and not the individual amounts, when the aggregate is constructed out of information about the individual amounts?

Mr. John M. Taylor: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the regulations will become part of the general law

of England, which means that they will apply to small companies and to large companies. Aggregates are much easier for small companies because the valuation of pensions and share prices in small companies is more difficult than it is in large companies where that information is available. If a company is a listed company, it will have to produce not merely the aggregate but the breakdown. That seems to be quite logical.

Mr. Cousins: My reply to the Minister is extremely simple. He draws a distinction between listed companies and unlisted companies. He seeks to lead the House towards the view that, if a company is not listed, it must be small, insignificant and trivial, and that it must involve a small group of family members or a small network of people, all of whom know each other's business and who are their own audience. That is simply not the case, as the Minister perfectly well knows.

Mr. Taylor: I am not attempting to delude anyone. Company law is quite clear. Within the Companies Act 1985, there is a definition of a small company and a medium company. Anything above that, the hon. Gentleman can choose to call a large company. There is a distinction between listed and unlisted companies. If he is asking me whether there is such a thing as an unlisted large company, I will tell him that there are such companies, but not very many.

Mr. Cousins: Those unlisted large companies include Vauxhall, Ford, Virgin and Eagle Star insurance. They are highly significant companies which have a great part to play in the affairs of our country. There is one significant feature about those unlisted companies. Some of the major ones are subsidiaries of companies that have their main financial and governance base outside this country.

Mr. John Marshall: Eagle Star insurance is a subsidiary of BAT Industries, which is a British-registered company. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the vast majority of unregistered companies are very small—normally too small even to consider the alternative investment market?

Mr. Cousins: It is true that a great many unlisted companies are small companies, but I have drawn attention to an extremely important point: some substantial, important and influential companies are not listed. A practice is growing—one of the examples that I have given illustrates it precisely—of buying in shares in order to de-list. For whatever reason—I do not intend to explore the reasons in any individual case tonight—that practice is growing and it avoids the openness and the accountability that comes with meeting the stock exchange rules.

I attempted to raise this point earlier with my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, and I now put it directly to the Minister, who I hope will respond to it. We now have many more significant examples in the utilities sector of water and electricity companies being purchased by companies located outside Britain. I do not necessarily object to that; the practice is increasing owing to the competition for share value in the markets—it has a product and a result. The rules should allow disclosure of the emoluments of individual company directors in large companies that have their main governance home outside this country.

It is now an almost weekly event for utility companies which were originally based in this country to have their corporate governance directed by companies located outside Britain. There are already some significant examples, including Vauxhall and Ford. The least that we should do is to ensure that companies whose corporate governance is in this country cannot evade disclosure by having their base outside the country and drawing upon the corporate governance practices of different regimes when establishing what they need to disclose. The Minister has said it himself: in some important respects, our practice of corporate governance disclosure is running ahead and setting a standard of practice for the rest of the world. That is not something to be ashamed of and go back on, but something to develop and exploit.

Mr. Marshall: The hon. Gentleman has referred to Ford and Vauxhall and has said that their UK executives should be subject to more stringent disclosure than their United States executives. He also said that disclosure in the UK is ahead of other countries. Does he seek to encourage motor car companies to locate in Britain by saying that their executives in this country will be subject to more rigid rules than in other countries? Is that designed to encourage overseas companies to come to this country?

Mr. Cousins: The hon. Gentleman's intervention significantly gives the game away. If it is the intention of the Government or any of their supporters to create two entirely different regimes of corporate governance with different standards of disclosure—one for companies based in this country and another for companies based abroad—an enormous perverse incentive has been created for the relocation of central company decision making in other foreign governance regimes. We should be seeking to establish a corporate governance regime that applies to all the major operators in the country and sets standards of practice here for the rest of the world to follow.

I think that I already have the answer to the question that I am putting to the Minister. I think that the Minister is happy for there to be major unlisted companies—located sometimes abroad, sometimes in this country—that will not have to follow the regime of disclosure that the House is discussing tonight.

Mr. Bell: Does my hon. Friend agree that the corporate governance in the US is more transparent than in our country? The other day, Michael Eisner of Disney had to answer to shareholders for his remuneration. Would it not be pleasant to see more of that in our own country?

Mr. Cousins: My hon. Friend is right. If any significant company in this country were exposed to the sort of shareholder activism practised by a major American pension fund such as the California state employees' pension fund, it would be horrified at the degree of accountability that is enforced there—not just through attendance at annual general meetings, but through constant and rigorous scrutiny of activities and developments. In many important ways, the California state pension scheme provides an example to the world of intelligent, well-directed, inspired shareholder activism. In many important ways, the draft regulations do not take us towards that objective, but rein us back. At best, they represent one cheer for shareholder democracy. As my

[Mr. Cousins]

hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough has said, when we have a new Government who understand the way in which the financial and share-owning markets of today work, we shall revisit the issues and shed more light on them.

6.56 pm

Mr. John M. Taylor: The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) said that the House was depleted in number tonight because some of his colleagues were already on the hustings. If so, they had better beware the Representation of the People Act 1983, lest they should have started incurring election expenses already—but that was a topic for the previous debate. As always, the hon. Gentleman was a generous debating opponent; it is always a pleasure to debate with him, even though we do not always find large measures of agreement. He was good enough to say that the subject was technical and that it might be necessary to come back to some of the issues later—and I do not mean on the Floor of the House. If any of my colleagues who have followed the debate, from either side of the House, feel that I do not address all the technical issues in my winding-up speech, they should feel free to write to me. I promise to address the points that they raise.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough seemed to have doubts about offering different treatment for listed, unlisted and the smallest companies. It is natural to provide different treatment for those companies because they are different. It is right that a higher level of disclosure should be called for from listed companies than from unlisted companies.

I shall try to deal with the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) as directly as possible. He postulated the theory—in fact, he did not merely postulate it as we know that it already happens—of a utility that is privatised, or floated, and subsequently taken over by an overseas company. In such a case, full information relating to the remuneration, shares and share options of directors of the utility at the time of the takeover bid will be published in accordance with the rules of the takeover panel.

After the takeover, if it happens, the utility is likely to become a wholly owned subsidiary of the overseas parent. It will be subject to the same rules as any other unlisted UK company—it must disclose the emoluments of the directors in aggregate and, if the aggregate figure exceeds £200,000, the emoluments of the highest-paid director. If any directors lose office as a result of the takeover, the accounts must show the aggregate amount of any compensation paid, including the money value of any non-cash benefits.

After the takeover, it is unlikely that the directors of the utility will hold share options in the utility as all the shares are likely to have been acquired by the parent company as part of the takeover process. In other words, the subsidiary would be reduced to having one shareholder. Greenbury is about disclosure of information about directors to shareholders, and the single shareholder will know all about the directors because it will own the subsidiary for which they work—indeed, it will almost certainly set their terms of employment. The remuneration of the directors of the utility following the takeover, including any special features which could conceivably extend to share options in the parent, will be a matter for the parent company as sole shareholder. The directors of the subsidiary will of course no longer have the ability to determine their own remuneration. The parent company will have full access to relevant information, without needing to rely on statutory disclosures.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough said that, as a trustee—presumably of an estate or settlement; I know not what and it is not my business—he found that the Inland Revenue had been swift to seek a valuation of unlisted shares in certain circumstances, such as a sale or disposal for capital taxes. In the event of a disposal, a valuation is required; that is almost certainly a proper part of revenue law, but it is quite another matter to require the value of those shares to be calculated every year for accounts purposes. That would be expensive for unlisted companies and we are not in the business of making life more difficult for unlisted companies. The hon. Gentleman might also want to reflect on the fact that changes to company law requiring shareholders to vote or to declare their voting record will require primary legislation.

I am under injunction from the silent ones to move on—I know their authority in this place and there will be no second-guessing from me. In conclusion, I simply want to say that I am no supporter of fat cats; I have no appetite for such matters and the Prime Minister has declared similar sentiments. Whereas we are well up with the European average—in fact, we are roughly typical of the European average—for executive pay, we are well below the levels seen in the United States of America.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough says that he will build on Hampel, but it is we who will be watching the developments on Hampel. As another successful exercise following the comparable successes of Cadbury and Greenbury, we shall be here to deal with them as we are doing tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Company Accounts (Disclosure of Directors' Emoluments) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 6th February, be approved.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Social Security

That the draft Jobseeker's Allowance (Workskill Courses) Pilot Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 28th January, be approved.

That the draft Jobseeker's Allowance (Project Work Pilot Scheme) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 5th February, be approved.

That the draft Jobseeker's Allowance (Project Work Pilot Scheme) (No. 2) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 5th February, be approved.

That the draft Jobseeker's Allowance (Contract for Work) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Jobseeker's Allowance and Mariners' Benefits) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 17th February, be approved.

CONTRACTING OUT

That the draft Contracting Out (Functions of the Registrar General in relation to authorising re-registration of births) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 11th February, be approved.

RATING AND VALUATION

That the draft British Gas plc. (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Amendment Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 11th February, be approved.

That the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Chargeable Amounts for Small Hereditaments) Amendment Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 12th February, be approved.

That the draft British Gas plc (Rateable Values) (Amendment) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 12th February, be approved.

AGRICULTURE

That the draft Farm Woodland (Amendment) Scheme 1997, which was laid before this House on 12th February, be approved.

That the draft Farm Woodland Premium Scheme 1997, which was laid before this House on 12th February, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Education (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 3rd December, be approved.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Child Pornography

7.3 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am pleased to present this petition on behalf of the members of the Cambridge Student Methodist Society and the Action for Children Campaign and other citizens of the United Kingdom. They have collected 1,000 signatures, including Mr. Graham St. John-Willey of the Action for Children Campaign, Chris Marsh of Queens' college, Cambridge, and Kim Jensen of Newnham college, Cambridge. The petition states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of Members of Cambridge Student Methodist Society with Action for Children Campaign and other Citizens of the United Kingdom,

Sheweth

That we, the undersigned, hereby:

1. express our deep concern at continuing reports that citizens of developed nations travelling abroad may be encouraging the use of children in prostitution and pornography;

2. affirm our commitment to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which seeks to protect children from sexual exploitation; and

3. call upon Her Majesty's Government to seek to play an active role in bringing about concerted international action to tackle this problem and in particular to examine ways of ensuring that individuals involved in such exploitation are brought to justice within the United Kingdom.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House do introduce legislation to ensure that citizens of the United Kingdom who commit serious sexual offences against children abroad can be prosecuted in this country.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Doorstep Milk Delivery Service

7.4 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I rise to present a petition in support of the United Kingdom doorstep milk delivery service. The petition states:

To the House of Commons.

The Petition of Citizens of the United Kingdom,

Declares that

The UK doorstep milk delivery service is part of the fabric of our community. It provides a unique service to consumers, a valuable community contact and employment for many thousands of people; It is important that consumers retain the opportunity to choose to have milk and other foodstuffs delivered to their door by the doorstep delivery service; The milk-round provides an important social service, calling direct to people's doors and providing vital contact for those who have difficulty in leaving their home; It is important that a thriving doorstep delivery service is maintained, for the benefit of the whole community.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons take steps to help ensure the continuance of our doorstep delivery service.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Cyprus

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

7.6 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): One of the difficulties with arranging Adjournment debates is that, normally, they start at 10 pm or just after and one prepares for the day accordingly. This evening, there is an annual meeting in one of the wards in my association and when I knew that I had been drawn for tonight's Adjournment debate I cheerfully hoped that, without difficulty, I would be standing and addressing the people of the Child's Hill ward at 8 o'clock this evening. However, by Thursday, I had discovered that there was no prospect of my being able to do so. Little did I believe, however, that I would be speaking at six minutes past 7 o'clock.

This is not the first time that I have taken part in an Adjournment debate on Cyprus. Indeed, the last time my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) and I spoke on this subject, the mayor in exile from Famagusta and his deputy were both in the Strangers Gallery and one of our colleagues was not exactly commended by the Chair for pointing out that fact. This evening, we can commend the mayor in exile from Famagusta for his patience and courage in fighting the events since 1974 and for his determination that his people will eventually be rehoused in their own homes.

I have instituted several Adjournment debates on Cyprus. I feel rather like one of Elizabeth Taylor's former husbands, who said that he knew what to do, but did not know how to make it interesting. I first visited Cyprus in 1977. At that stage, I was struck by the cruelty that had deprived more than 100,000 Cypriots of their own homes. I was struck by the tragedy that had meant that families were prevented from living in the homes that had been in their families for generations. I was appalled by the harsh reality that individuals could see their own homes, be it in Famagusta or Nicosia, but not have the opportunity to live in them. I was also impressed by the resilience of the economy and the speed with which the tourism industry had recovered from the events of 1974.

I remember three events especially. In 1979, when I was in Cyprus, I was entertained to a mezze in Charlie's bar in Nicosia, and the man who was giving the lunch said that he had been obliged to flee from the Turks in 1974. His whole family had fled, but his father had taken slightly longer than the rest because he wanted to flee with the title deeds to his home. I remember his words: "And a lot of good it did him, because he has died without the opportunity to go home."

I remember on another occasion standing on the green line in Nicosia and looking over to Turkish-occupied Nicosia. I saw a shop there—a tailor's shop. There was the tailor's dummy, as it had been in 1974. There was cloth in the window—affected a bit by the sun, but there it was, as it had been in 1974, so sudden had been the retreat. People had retreated at the speed of lightning to preserve their lives.

I shall also remember attending, in 1995, with my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton and the hon. Members for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) and for Tooting (Mr. Cox), the annual event outside Famagusta where thousands of citizens of free Famagusta demonstrate against the fact that they are unable to live in their homes. As we walked together towards the Austrian colonel, we could see the lights in Famagusta. On the left, the lights were all on; to the right there was complete darkness. That darkness was what had been Varosha, the kernel of the Cypriot tourist industry until 1974, now deserted.

As that demonstration of thousands of people looked towards Famagusta, some individuals could see lights on in their family homes, which they had left in 1974, and they knew that those lights were not lights that had been left on in 1974, but lights that had been put on that evening in 1995 by a Turkish settler or perhaps by Turkish troops. They knew that many of those homes were occupied by squatters.

What would your emotions be, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you were to move towards your constituency in Plymouth tomorrow morning and see lights on in your home and know that it had been occupied by someone and you were not allowed to live there, or even to go into that street? You would be full of distress. So it must be for someone who, for more than 20 years, has known that their home has been occupied by another family but has had no right to go there.

The world condemns ethnic cleansing—with all its associations with the evil regimes of the 1930s and the early 1940s—wherever it takes place. I remember my father saying, "Apartheid is wrong because we are all God's children." Cypriots are all God's children, and they deserve better of this world.

There are those in Foreign Offices worldwide who are concerned with realpolitik, and they recognise the impact that the Cyprus problem can have on the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Cyprus has had a long-standing desire to enter a closer relationship with Europe. I remember being told that in 1979. The European Union has a long-standing commitment to start negotiations within six months of the end of the intergovernmental conference, but some are now asking, "With whom should the European Union negotiate?"

I believe that the European Union can negotiate with only one group—the legitimate Government of Cyprus. Others have said that a divided Cyprus cannot join the European Union—despite the precedent that the European Community was created with a divided Germany. More important, those who argue that a divided Cyprus cannot join the European Union are in effect saying that Turkey has a right of veto over Cyprus's application to join the European Union.

If we grant to Turkey the right of veto over Cyprus's application to join, we cannot be surprised if there is a tit-for-tat reaction by Greece—would any Greek Government survive if they saw Turkey vetoing Cyprus's application? Turkey is not even a member of the European Union. Would any Greek Government survive if they did not react similarly to the applications by Poland, Hungary and the Czech lands? As one who wishes the European Union to expand to Cyprus and those democracies, I say it is wrong to suggest that anyone should have a right of veto over whether the legitimate Government of Cyprus and the people of Cyprus join the European Union.

To say that, in the absence of a settlement, there will be no accession of Cyprus to the European Union provides an inducement to those in the north not to settle. There is no evidence that Turkey wants Cyprus to join, and Turkey should not be presented with a lever to prevent Cyprus from joining the European Union.

There should be no link between a settlement of the Cyprus problem and Cyprus's application to join the European Union. We should recognise the fact that Cyprus qualifies for membership because of its democratic credentials, economic philosophy and financial prudence. Indeed, if Cyprus were in the European Union today, it, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom would be about the only countries to fulfil the Maastricht financial criteria. Perhaps, according to those criteria, Cyprus might almost be regarded as too sound to join the European Union.

The division of the island since 1974 has been a tragedy, especially for those in the north. The beaches of the north were once the most hospitable in Europe, but they have been deserted by western European tourists since 1974. The hotels of Varosha have been destroyed and, instead of being a haven for tourists, have become a home for stray dogs and rats. The north-south divide has been accentuated in Cyprus; incomes in the north have been depressed, whereas the south has prospered due to the resilience of the economy, the tourism industry and the hard work of everyone who works there.

In northern Cyprus, the population has been transformed. There are 30,000 troops in northern Cyprus today, and that—as befits me—is a conservative estimate. Other estimates suggest 35,000 or more. We should remember that we have never had more than 15,000 troops in Northern Ireland, facing the might of the IRA. There are twice as many troops in northern Cyprus as we have ever deemed it necessary to station in Northern Ireland. As Keith Kyle has recently pointed out, there were 104,000 Turkish Cypriots in northern Cyprus in 1960. Today, there are 198,215. Bearing in mind the fact that some people have left northern Cyprus, that means that more than half its population consists of settlers from Anatolia, instead of native Greek Cypriots.

One of the tragedies of the ethnic cleansing of 1974 lies in the fact that a whole generation of Cypriots has been denied the chance to mingle with each other. Rauf Denktash and Glafcos Clerides, the two leaders of their respective communities—the latter, the President of Cyprus who volunteered for the RAF in the second world war—were contemporaries who knew each other as young men. The tragedy today is that young Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots cannot play football together or go to the cinema or even drink coffee together. Instead, they have to come to London if they want to meet one another.

Another tragedy is the group of enclave people in Northern Cyprus—the small number of Greek Cypriots who said, "This is our home; this is where we were brought up; this is where we want to live." That may be so, but it is also where they have suffered. No one should be pushed around or punished for wanting to stay in the village where his family has lived for generations. I know that the late Lord Finsberg went to see the enclave people on behalf of the Council of Europe and was shocked by the treatment meted out to them.

The legacy of 1974 has been especially cruel to the relatives of missing persons. I have only once spoken on the same political platform as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), but he and I, my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton and the hon. Members for Knowsley, South and for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) all spoke in Trafalgar square at the annual rally against the continuing occupation of Cyprus by Turkish troops. It was very moving to see mothers showing pictures of their sons taken in 1974, wives showing pictures of their husbands and children showing pictures of their parents. They still do not know, 23 years on, what has happened to their loved ones. It is surely wrong that these people, many of them in the evening of their lives, should still be in that position.

There has been much discussion of the Cypriot Government's decision to buy 20 Russian S300 ground-to-air missiles. We must acknowledge that Cyprus is one of the most heavily militarised islands in the world. Why are there 35,000 Turkish troops in the north? Are they there to intimidate the local population? If so, they should not be there. If not, their purpose is purely aggressive.

Cyprus is only a few minutes' flying time from Turkey. Every country needs to be able to defend itself. We do of course regret the perceived need for the missiles, but we must all defend the right of the Government of Cyprus to self-defence. We can understand why the missiles have been ordered, and we must hope that the attempts to create peace will come to fruition before those missiles are fired.

Since I last spoke on this subject in the House, there has been a great deal of activity. The Foreign Secretary has been to Cyprus. I am sure that we all welcome the fact of his visit, and the fact that he said that there should be no right of partition or secession under a Cypriot agreement. Sir David Hannay has been busy; Ambassador Muratov of Russia has said that there will be a meeting of the permanent members of the Security Council in mid-March to discuss Cyprus; and Madeleine Albright, the United States Secretary of State, has also made it clear that she wants a settlement to this tragic problem. If the chances of success are related to the amount of diplomatic activity going on, those chances are much better now than they have been for a very long time.

This has been called the year of Cyprus. There must certainly be hope—23 years is far too long to wait. Many have died without the chance to see their homes again. Many still do not know the fate of their loved ones, and many have been unable to visit family graves for 23 years. Whole generations have grown up as citizens of a divided island. No Cypriot under the age of 30 can remember talking to his Greek or Turkish counterpart. The wait has been too long.

The people of Cyprus should not despair. Her friends in this House will continue to ensure that the problem receives the oxygen of publicity. Who in 1974 would have forecast that the Berlin wall would be knocked down? Who then would have guessed that Israel and King Hussein would sign a treaty of peace? Who in 1974 would have guessed that Nelson Mandela and the leaders of the National party in South Africa would be part, at least for a short time, of the same Government? It is said that God works in a mysterious way his miracles to perform. May 1997 be the year of miracles; may those miracles begin in Cyprus long before 1 May.

7.26 pm

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on raising this subject on the Adjournment. We had expected to find ourselves sitting here for half an hour at the end of the day listening to him with the Minister nodding in agreement, so this is a wonderful chance for us to have our say. It was typical of my hon. Friend to rise from his sick bed to set out the hopes and fears of the Cypriot people so clearly.

[Dr. Ian Twinn]

A great deal is said about Cyprus's past, about the divisions, the human rights problem, and the security problems for both communities—not to mention the missiles. In the end, however, there is only one objective to consider: the possibility of a just and lasting solution that will allow both communities on the island to live together in peace. The message with which we must concern ourselves is a simple one, but the path to that simple solution is a minefield, as the Labour Front-Bench spokesman recently discovered to his cost recently—when he suggested a rotating presidency, he found other things rotating rather quickly above his head.

We cannot allow ourselves the colonial luxury of dictating a solution to Cyprus: any solution must come from the hearts and souls of the people of both communities, who all want a solution and a prosperous island in which all can live together peaceably. It is not for us to dictate policy or to argue the details of Cyprus's history. There are two sides to all the arguments over that history since independence, and over Turkey's history.

In all fairness, both communities have good points to make about why better security arrangements are needed in Cyprus once we have a solution. Both communities have severe worries about what has happened in the past, especially in terms of security. Turkish Cypriots rightly think back to what happened in the early 1960s—for many of them 1963 was a year of horrors. Similarly, the coup, the invasion, the occupation and then the division of Cyprus in 1974 are a cause of nightmares for whole families of Greek Cypriots. There have been serious human rights violations in Cyprus, which need to be dealt with by the international community as well as by both Cypriot communities.

I have no doubt that the solution to the Cypriot problem is the one to which Mr. Denktash, President Clerides and other Cypriot leaders have agreed—a bi-zonal, bi-communal, federal solution for the whole of Cyprus, with one Government but with administrations that look after the interests of the two communities. It is not for the House of Commons to say what those arrangements should be, but it is for us to take action. That action should be taken in 1997 to bring about those solutions. After all, we are a guarantor power and it will for ever be a blot on our international reputation that we took no action in 1974—we allowed Turkey to respond to the Greek military coup and we all know what followed while Great Britain sat back with its troops on the island—in Britain's as well as Cyprus's interests, and in the interest of British and world peace.

We have no right to sit back and do nothing now, and I am glad that that view is shared by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), who is taking such an active role in seeking a solution.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South said, action has already been taken. The Foreign Secretary has visited Cyprus for the first time since independence. He also spoke to the Cypriot community in London this week at a meeting of Conservative Friends for Cyprus, with more than 20 hon. Members and parliamentary candidates throughout the country, demonstrating our interest in ensuring that we get a just and lasting solution.

This is not a party political issue. The deputy leader of the Labour party addressed a similar meeting in London and we give him due credit for that. To balance our Conservative Friends for Cyprus, the Labour party has the National Committee for Cyprus, run by the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale). The House has an all-party group of which the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) is an active member, as are the hon. Members for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche). We are an active group and we try to find ways of using the powers and authority of this House to move the argument forward. We do that in conjunction with the Cypriot community, to which we are grateful for keeping us briefed.

It is interesting to note how the political parties of Cyprus, which are all represented formally in this country with their own branches and organisations, work together across the political divide. We have as much in common with AKEL, the Cypriot communist party, EDEK, the socialist party, the Democratic party of Mr. Kyprianou, and the Democratic Rally party of President Clerides. We work together to ensure that the voice of Cyprus—the voice for justice, human rights and the interests of all Cypriots, whether Greek or Turkish—is heard. We pay great tribute to those in the Cypriot community who have tirelessly sought to attract the attention of hon. Members of this House and of the other place to put that case forward.

After 23 years, however, Cyprus is still divided. In truth, we have not made much progress. The outlines of a federal solution were agreed between the two communities many years ago but we still face the prospect of a divided island. It is a scar across Europe: a European country with two allies as fellow guarantor powers—Turkey and Greece—who cannot agree with each other, with us or with the people of Cyprus about how to proceed.

It may seem strange for some hon. Members to hear those such as me extolling the virtues of the European Union to resolve the problem, but I believe that a secure future for Cyprus lies within the European Union. That is one reason why my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South and I are keen to support the concept of the European Union. We want a wider European Union encompassing all the people of Europe so that we can live together in peace and help each other with our problems. We have a duty to help Cyprus, and to help it to become part of the European Union.

My hon. Friend has already outlined our concerns about whether Turkey should be allowed a veto. Of course it should not be allowed a veto on who joins an organisation of which it is not a member. We all know that it would be infinitely preferable, in the words of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, if we had a united Cyprus by the time Cyprus joins the European Union. It would be in Europe's interests and those of both communities. It would be particularly in the interests of Turkish Cypriots, because the economic and security advantages that could be put in place by that solution would boost their living standards and sense of security.

Before I sit down, may I make a plea to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State? While we are proud of what the British Government are doing, and are keen that our voice should be heard in Europe and that our European partners should support our objective for Cyprus, we also realise that this is a world problem, which could ruin

world peace. Cyprus is part of Europe; it is in the Mediterranean, but it is also close to Africa and the middle east. We do not want security problems in that region. It is in nobody's interest, least of all that of the United States. We understand the close relationship between Turkey and the United States. Over the years, they have worked together for peace in many ways.

None of those of us who make the case for Cyprus is anti-Turkish. We regard Turkey as a valued ally within NATO. That is the route that we should go down. However, we need to ask our friends in the United States to increase their influence on Turkey, to raise Turkey's place on their agenda from the lower end of their top 10 world problems to the top, so that America tells Turkey that there will be a solution and says that it will put its full weight behind achieving a solution in 1997. That is the sort of action that we expect from the House of Commons and which our friends across the water in the United States also want. I hope that we can all work together so that by the end of 1997 we can feel more confident about peace in the Mediterranean.

7.37 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I welcome the opportunity to say a few words in this debate. Having noted it in my diary, I expected merely to come along and support the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), whom I congratulate on securing this debate on the important topic of Cyprus and on his admirable resumé of the different aspects of the problem.

I endorse the hon. Gentleman's remarks about Famagusta, which has poignant memories for me. In the past I secured a debate on the subject of Famagusta, which is a tragic waste of what should be the jewel of the Mediterranean. The town could be a test-bed for a solution and for demonstrating that Greek and Turkish Cypriots could learn to live again in harmony. I also agree with the hon. Gentleman about the missing people. He will recall that last year I promulgated a private Member's Bill suggesting that a commission of inquiry should be set up to delve into the fate of the missing people. It is heartbreaking to see, at any demonstration of Greek Cypriots that one attends, those aging ladies clutching to their breasts photographs of their loved ones as they were in 1974. In all human decency they should be allowed before they die to know the fate of their loved ones. That is all that they demand.

I endorse the remarks of the hon. Member for Hendon, South about the enclaves. I would add that when young Greek Cypriots in the enclaved areas finish primary school, they have to leave the area to pursue secondary and further education and they are not allowed back. That is a violation of human rights and as good an instrument of ethnic cleansing as one will ever get.

I agree with many of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn). We are members of different political parties, but he is right that Cyprus is not a party political issue among us: as he said, we work together across the parties in the House and with all the political parties of Cyprus. We are not conscious of political affiliation when we address the problem.

I agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton also when he says that we should not dictate to the Cypriots how they should come to a solution, but as a guarantor power we have an enormous legal and moral responsibility to do all that we can to secure a situation in which the two sides can reach an agreed, just and lasting solution to the Cyprus problem.

I have been concerned about the torrent of literature that I have received in the mail recently from various organisations identifying with the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot cause, all of which looks back with hatred and anger to the position 30 years ago—a generation even before the invasion of 1974. That distresses me because it helps no one. We should say to all the Cypriots—Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots—that we should look not backward in anger, but forward with hope of a future together in prosperity for all Cypriots.

There is a danger in the present situation. There were three awful murders on the dividing line in the summer of 1996, when an unarmed Greek Cypriot, Tassos Isaak, crossed the barbed wire, as has been done many times, to demonstrate his demand to return to his rightful homeland and was beaten to death by people wearing Turkish Cypriot uniform. Indeed, I am told that he was beaten so violently about the head with iron bars that his eyes popped out of their sockets. That gruesome murder was recorded on television.

The next week, in demonstrations following the funeral of that unfortunate young man, a relative of his, Solomos Solomou, climbed a flagpole from which a Turkish flag was flying. Perhaps he should not have been doing that, but it was a peaceful demonstration. Again, recorded on videotape and seen throughout the world, a person in Turkish uniform could be seen taking careful aim and shooting him—not in the knee, elbow or ankle to bring him down from the flagpole which he had climbed only to the height of a few feet, but in the head. As he lay on the ground clutching his head, one could see more shots being fired at his head. Soon afterwards there was a third case of a person being shot, but I will not give the gruesome detail of that.

I have given those awful details because they illustrate the fact that the present situation is fraught with the danger of even more bloodshed than there was in the 1960s or in 1974.

The House should never forget the legitimacy of the Turkish invasion of 1974, and the illegitimacy of the Turks' continued stay, occupying northern Cyprus. In 1974 there was an attempted coup d'état against the lawful Government of Cyprus, supported by the Greek military junta. The junta fell as a result of its action in fomenting the coup. The attempted coup lasted several days and, after it failed, the lawful Government were restored.

Under the treaty of guarantee, the Turkish Government had the right to intervene to restore the status quo, but once the status quo was restored the Turkish army did not have the right to stay. It is well to have it established once again on record in the House that the continued occupation of northern Cyprus by the Turkish army is therefore illegitimate.

The most important step that could be taken towards a speedy solution of the Cyprus problem is the demilitarisation of the island. One recognises that one could not tell Turkey to take its 35,000 troops away immediately, but a scaling down could begin immediately. President Clerides has made the offer to demilitarise on the southern side of the island, in return for

[Mr. Edward O'Hara]

demilitarisation in the north, and to support the costs of an international peacekeeping force with no ethnic Greek or Turkish troops on the island.

Demilitarisation is urgently needed. We have seen the consequence of the S300, to which the hon. Member for Hendon, South referred. While there is an excess of armaments on Cyprus, the potential for armed conflict will continue to exist.

As the hon. Member for Edmonton implied, when we speak of human rights in Cyprus, we are not talking only about the human rights of Greek Cypriots, although of course they are at stake; we are talking of the human rights of Turkish Cypriots, too, and of Maronites—the human rights of all lawful citizens of the Republic of Cyprus. When we speak of the interests of the Cypriots in the context of entry into the EU, we are not talking of the interests of Greek Cypriots alone. We are speaking even more of the interests of Turkish Cypriots, because their economy has suffered grievously since 1974.

Finally, I echo the concluding remarks of the hon. Member for Edmonton when he referred to the need for peace and stability in the Mediterranean. I remind the House also that although the Cyprus issue is separate, it cannot be disconnected from the issue of relations between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean. There is an extremely volatile situation there between two members of NATO which daily carries the risk of armed conflict, and an escalation of that conflict does not bear thinking about. That situation in the Aegean will never be resolved until the situation in Cyprus is resolved. Like all hon. Members, I hope that, with the renewed interest and activity in Cyprus, the year 1997 will be the year of Cyprus, when we achieve a just and lasting solution that brings prosperity to all in Cyprus.

7.49 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) for giving us the opportunity to discuss events in Cyprus once again, and I congratulate him on his eloquent contribution this evening. I hope that the people of Child's Hill ward will forgive my hon. Friend's absence: we are grateful to them for allowing him to be here this evening. I understand that he has also lifted up his bed and walked in order to attend, so we are doubly grateful for his presence.

Many of the subjects mentioned tonight have been covered in previous speeches in the House. I have responded to them, and all my answers given at the Dispatch Box stand. I shall not repeat them tonight. My hon. Friend mentioned the need to make debates and speeches on the same issue exciting. I shall not endeavour to be as exciting as any husband of Elizabeth Taylor—

Mr. John Marshall: But more successful.

Mr. Davis: I shall aim at least for greater longevity.

I shall try to be measured in my response, as I believe that that is the most constructive contribution that I can make to both the debate and the Cyprus question in future.

We last debated the subject shortly before my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary visited the island in mid-December. During that debate, I said that, if 1996 could be described as a year of danger, 1997 might be seen as a year of opportunity: time for a serious effort to settle the Cyprus problem. We had some cause for encouragement: both President Clerides and Mr. Denktash told the Foreign Secretary in Cyprus that they, too, viewed 1997 as an important year. Mr. Denktash said publicly that he believed that a settlement could be achieved with give and take on both sides.

For all that, 1997 has not yet brought much cheer to those who want to see a settlement in Cyprus. The first two months have been difficult. I shall devote most of my remarks this evening to developments during that period, and to the conclusion that I believe that we should draw from them: this is a time neither for bright optimism nor for deep gloom but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) said, for action.

In the first week of this year, the Government of Cyprus announced their plan to buy a Russian surface-to-air missile system, to which several hon. Members have referred. The quick reaction from the Turkish side was both threatening and bellicose. Neither move has helped to promote a climate congenial to progress on a settlement. Rather than intensifying it, the result has been to divert energy and attention from the serious efforts needed to achieve a settlement. It has no doubt also given great encouragement to those in both communities who want to derail those efforts.

There has been much talk about the defensive nature of weapons and the right of states to defend themselves. I do not question that right. However, I do seriously question whether this missile purchase was the right decision at this time of some opportunity in Cyprus—especially when the United Nations Security Council has again underlined its concern about the excessive levels of military forces and armaments in Cyprus.

After that unpromising start to 1997, can things get better? I believe they can, but only with readiness on both sides to stop looking for excuses and start looking for solutions. I do not think that anyone doubts the determination that the United Nations, the United Kingdom, the United States—to which my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton referred—the European Union and others have shown in recent months in a methodical and concerted effort in support of a settlement. They have worked to build a basis of understanding on which the leaders of the two communities can engage. However, it is that engagement that will count in the end: no matter how committed our supporting efforts and encouragement, only the parties themselves can make the decisions that will underpin a comprehensive political settlement.

For that reason, I hope that, in the crucial months ahead, both leaders will engage seriously and positively with the United Nations Secretary-General's special representative and all those who visit Cyprus to support his mission. I hope that both leaders will focus with determination on how to move quickly to face-to-face negotiations, and beyond that to the goal of a comprehensive agreement.

What are the prospects of success? I mentioned the visit to Cyprus in December by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. He had detailed talks with both leaders, and set out in his press conference afterwards a list of 10 points that he believed constituted the best basis for making progress. The points draw on

positions established over many years of efforts to achieve a settlement, and I believe that they reflect a significant degree of common ground in setting out the general shape of an acceptable settlement.

However, neither side yet has a clear route map of how it will move towards that settlement. The international community—the United Nations, supported by the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union and others—has a crucial role to play in helping to draw that map. However, in the end, it will be up to the Cypriots whether they wish to use it. Should they choose to do so, we are under no illusions: difficult choices and compromises lie ahead for both sides in a number of areas. For example, how will a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation look in practice? How should political equality be expressed in the new constitution? How will the powers of the two zones be defined? What powers should the presidency be given? What arrangements should be made for those who became refugees in 1974? Fundamentally, what security arrangements will there be to underpin a settlement?

We can put the questions, and we may even suggest some answers, but the Cypriots are the only people who can provide those answers. Security is a case in point. In his 10 points, my right hon. and learned Friend said:

"the security of each of the two communities and of the settlement as a whole will be achieved by means of international guarantees and by such measures of international collective security as may be agreed by the parties."

As ever in Cyprus, the statement has been construed in some quarters as calling for the dilution of the 1960 treaty of guarantee; in others, it has been described as unqualified support for it. The statement actually reflects the simple fact that a settlement will need to be based on security arrangements with which both sides can be comfortable. Beyond that, it reflects implicitly that the present situation provides no real, lasting security. At best, it provides a short-term and inadequate comfort blanket, wherein each community's security is obtained at the cost of the insecurity of the other community.

By way of conclusion, I mention once again the European dimension. I make no apologies for retreading ground that we have covered in previous debates. It is important that the issues are clearly understood. The European Union factor is a comparatively new and positive development. It offers a real opportunity, but how can that opportunity best be taken?

Few disagree that the best solution is for a political settlement to precede the accession negotiations. In those circumstances, negotiations would be joined by the Government of a bi-zonal, bi-communal, federal Cyprus. The date for negotiations to start has been agreed by the European Union, and that commitment will be honoured. However, we remain convinced that the negotiating process will be much easier and the path to accession much smoother if, by then, a settlement is assured or in sight.

Again, let me make it absolutely clear—in direct response to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South—that nobody, I repeat nobody, outside the European Union can, whatever the circumstances, veto Cyprus's accession to the Union. It is not impossible for a divided Cyprus to enter the European Union, but no one should assume that negotiations by a divided Cyprus would be simple or straightforward.

In that context, I want to spend a few minutes on the question that arose at last week's General Affairs Council in Brussels about the participation of the Turkish Cypriot community in Cyprus's accession negotiations. We were, of course, disappointed that it proved impossible to reach agreement among all member states on the question, and that, as a result, the structured dialogue meeting with Cyprus that was scheduled for 25 February had to be cancelled. It was a particular pity, because we felt that it was rather straightforward and uncontentious simply to express the hope that a situation would be achieved in which all Cypriots could participate in the negotiation process.

Clearly, a settlement before the negotiations started would achieve such an aim. It is a separate question—and one that we cannot judge now—what other circumstances might permit Turkish Cypriot participation in the accession negotiations. We wanted the GAC message to encourage the Turkish Cypriot community to see EU accession as an opportunity. What we seek to achieve is what the March 1995 Council envisaged: that accession should benefit all communities in Cyprus, as I have heard reflected in this debate.

The events of last summer and the developments in the past few weeks reminded us how easily steps backwards can be taken. The arguments for steps forward should be all the more compelling. That is why the Government will persevere and persevere in their efforts in support of a settlement.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 4 March 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Tuesday 11 March.

LEVER PARK BILL *(By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 11 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

1. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on local authority capital expenditure plans for 1997–98. [17001]

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): The Government forecast that local authority capital expenditure in England in 1997–98 will be £6.2 billion.

Mr. Burden: On the day that Birmingham city council meets to set its budget, will the Secretary of State congratulate Birmingham on being the most solvent council in the country, having reduced its debts by 5 per cent. in the same period as the Government have doubled the national debt? Secondly, will he explain to the people of Birmingham why the Government have cut the capital allocation to Birmingham by some 50 per cent. and education funding by 80 per cent? Why do the Government seem determined to stop Birmingham's children being educated in schools that have had all the necessary repairs?

Mr. Gummer: It is difficult for the hon. Gentleman to talk about education in Birmingham, given its scandalous history of education spending by Labour and the way in which money that should have been used for education was spent elsewhere. Birmingham's basic credit approvals for 1997-98 are the highest of the 392 authorities in the country. The hon. Gentleman should accept that his party has made a commitment that there will be no extra money, so if he wants an explanation to give to the people of Birmingham, he had better seek it from the shadow Chancellor.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that large numbers of local authorities could lay their hands on funds for capital expenditure if they transferred their housing to housing associations and paid off their housing debts? Does not the fact that Liberal and Labour-controlled local authorities hang on to their council houses like Stalin hung on to agriculture say something about them and their political parties?

Mr. Gummer: The fact is that, under the new regime that we have put in place, in 25 Birmingham wards the local authority could spend 100 per cent. of its capital receipts if it went down the route that my hon. Friend described. Birmingham would have every opportunity to spend more if it opted for large-scale voluntary transfers as we would like and the tenants have agreed.

Ms Armstrong: Has the Secretary of State read the report prepared for his Department by York Consulting on capital challenge? Does he agree with one of its basic findings that capital challenge has skewed the decisions away from basic needs, so that authorities have been unable to address the basic needs of their communities, but instead have had to respond to the Government's lottery? Will the Secretary of State meet local authorities to discuss the matter before the Government reach a decision? Will he take that basic finding of the report into account?

Mr. Gummer: As we commissioned the report, we shall take its findings into account and discuss them with local authorities, as we promised when we started the pilot programme. What is more, Birmingham received £5.7 million under capital challenge. Local authorities that go in for capital challenge decide their own priorities. The hon. Lady wants me to continue with a situation in which we, instead of local authorities, decide where they should spend their money.

Mr. Garnier: As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) is so worried about local authority capital expenditure, will my right hon. Friend tell the House about the level of local authority capital debt across England and Wales, whether that has some affect on the public finances, and the Labour party's answer to the question?

Mr. Gummer: Birmingham's problem in those circumstances is that, if the Labour party came to power and did what it said it would—release capital receipts—Birmingham would receive no money, because it has no capital receipts. Indeed, Birmingham would receive less money from capital allocations because, as local authorities that do have capital receipts spend them, the money available to be spent on capital would be reduced—unless Labour were to decide that it would increase public spending. However, Labour has said that it would not increase public spending. It cannot have it both ways.

Royal Docks (Newham)

2. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the Government's plans for the continued administrative operations and financing of the royal docks in the borough of Newham. [17002]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): English Partnerships will complete certain projects in the royal docks when the London Docklands development corporation winds up, in March 1998. The LDDC is discussing with Newham successor arrangements for its other legal responsibilities.

Mr. Spearing: Apart from the legal responsibilities of the London borough of Newham, are there not significant costs in maintaining the royal docks' magnificent marine facilities—which happen to be in Newham, but which provide services for all of London? In particular, the Victoria dock project for young people provides facilities for sailing, rowing and canoeing, and the magnificent 2,000 m Olympic rowing course would be available not only to residents of the south-east but to everyone in the United Kingdom, and perhaps also to citizens of Europe and of the wider world. If there are difficulties in maintaining those expensive facilities, does he not think that some provision should be made so that an unfair burden is not placed on those who live adjacent to the docks' facilities?

Sir Paul Beresford: We are aware of the hon. Gentleman's concern. I can assure him that, certainly in the short term, English Partnerships will assume many of the responsibilities and that Newham will assume some. We are currently in discussion with those two organisations, on the basis of an asset-liability package. He will also be aware of the Royal Docks Management Authority. We anticipate that, in the long term, funding for it will come from service charges to developers of the area.

Earth Summit II

3. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to involve non-governmental environmental organisations in the planning for the British contribution to the Earth summit II in New York in June. [17003]

Mr. Gummer: The NGOs' involvement began with an Oxford seminar in June 1996, and continued with a Government consultation paper which was issued at the end of December. Comments on the paper are now being considered. We are in close touch with non-governmental organisations and have invited them, local government and businesses to join the United Kingdom delegation to the event and to the two preparatory meetings.

Mr. Smith: As the Minister is unlikely to be available in April for the final planning meetings for Earth summit II, what plans does he have to give more responsibility to NGOs and local authority delegations to press the United Kingdom's case? What action will he take to ensure that banks are meeting their Rio commitments? According to this week's Green Alliance report, they are failing dismally.

Mr. Gummer: We are keeping NGOs closely involved, as we have throughout. We are of course including Friends of the Earth—which, on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition, appears to have been excluded from his meeting.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Further to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, will he confirm that Friends of the Earth is playing an important part in planning Britain's contribution to the second Earth summit? Does that not stand in stark contrast to the extremely petty action of the Leader of the Opposition, who has banned Mr. Charles Secrett, executive director of Friends of the Earth, from attending his meeting with other environmental chiefs, simply because he had the temerity to write an article criticising the Labour party's environmental record?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have found that Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and other organisations are particularly important in giving us advice. I have excluded no one from the discussions that we have had. I am sorry that the Labour party—which knows so little about the environment and has had so few meetings on it—has, now that it has called such a meeting, decided to exclude one of the most important organisations. Friends of the Earth has shown great independence of mind in criticising the Labour party.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: One of the issues that concerns the NGOs in relation to Earth summit II is the continuing problem of relations between the United Nations' environmental work and the World Trade Organisation, which remained entirely unresolved at the Singapore meeting. Is there any progress on that?

Mr. Gummer: I am not sure that it is fair to say that the problems are entirely unresolved. It is clear that the international environmental commitments that we have entered into cannot be overthrown by decisions of the WTO. We are seeking to ensure that proper protection of the environment continues and that any argument between the two can be resolved. Britain will continue to play a creative part in that.

Mr. Meacher: As reducing carbon dioxide emissions will be such a crucial issue at Earth summit II, why did the Secretary of State cave in last night at the European Environment Council by tamely accepting a much lower level of cut than is needed? How can he pretend to green leadership in Europe when he offers only a 10 per cent. cut by 2010, whereas Germany and Austria have offered a 25 per cent. cut and the Labour party is committed to a 20 per cent. cut? Is not his problem that the Conservatives' hostility to public transport, which is environmentally friendly, and his recent cut in the funding of energy efficiency, far from helping to find a solution to global warming, have made it a lot worse?

Mr. Gummer: Every comment that the hon. Gentleman has made is wholly wrong. Britain has taken the lead and has brought other nations on board. We were the first country to go for a commitment. We are the only country in Europe to be able to cut our emissions to below 1990 levels before 2000. The Labour party is committed to spending more money on coal-fired power stations, which would increase emissions. The Labour party has the worst environmental record of any socialist party in Europe and is a laughing stock among all its neighbours. All the other Ministers at the Council of Ministers, including those from Germany and Austria, complimented the United Kingdom on our leadership and wondered how we managed to play such a role with a Labour Opposition so uncommitted to the environment.

Local Authority Services

4. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about replacing local authorities' services with cash allowances. [17004]

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): None that I am aware of. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has received a number of representations in connection with the community care direct payments scheme.

Mr. Thurnham: The Government say that they are in favour of more choice and opportunity. Why do they deny community care direct payments to 700,000 pensioners? Surely it is nonsense to say that town halls cannot cope with it as an optional scheme.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman will know that we are often pressed to introduce programmes on a trial basis and to extend them once we have ascertained that the trial works effectively. The scheme applies to people under 65. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will follow it closely. The option of extending it remains open if it demonstrates its value.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that many local authorities are unable to carry out the tasks that they are meant to perform, such as collecting rents, renting out houses to new tenants and collecting council tax? Will he therefore be wary of giving additional burdens to councils that are so incompetent at carrying out their existing duties?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is right. The scheme involves giving money to people so that they can acquire services or equipment, short-circuiting the normal bureaucracies. It is a cost-effective way of giving choice, flexibility and speed of response. As for the fulfilment of basic managerial functions, it is worth remembering that a 1 per cent. improvement in council tax collection rates across the country would be equivalent to £80 million to spend on local services.

Rented Housing

5. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new rented housing starts he estimates will be made by (a) housing associations and (b) local authorities in 1997–98. [17005]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): We estimate that the Housing Corporation will grant approximately 26,000 approvals for new rented housing association homes in 1997-98.

Mrs. Jackson: I am not sure whether the Minister was present when his colleague, the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, told the Select Committee on the Environment on 10 January last year that he considered that 60,000 new starts in the affordable rented sector was "quite robust". The hon. Gentleman will also be aware that the actual figure is less than half that. I am sure that his colleague did not want to mislead the Environment Committee. Was it simply incompetence on the part of the Department in not meeting its own targets?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Lady is right in that I was not present in the Environment Committee, but she is also wrong. If she studies the evidence, she will see that our target was 60,000 lettings, not new starts. She knows that we meet housing need in a variety of ways besides new starts, including tenants buying their own homes and the releasing of existing houses for new tenants. The target is 58,000 to 60,000 new lettings over the year—which we shall achieve.

Mr. Wilkinson: May I say how right my hon. Friend is to emphasise the role of the private rented sector in meeting housing need? In that regard, will he and his Department have a careful look at the notorious activities of Hillingdon borough council in using public money through the Housing Corporation to promote housing association developments on green chain and public open space such as recreation ground in my constituency—a move that is bitterly opposed by local residents?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is right. The private rented sector has an important role to play in meeting housing need. It has been very good that, since 1988, there has been a major revival in the private rented sector due to deregulation, which the Labour party bitterly opposed at the time but which has been a great success. My hon. Friend is also right to say that it is important that we protect our green belt.

Mr. Beggs: More and more elderly people and more and more disabled people like to feel that they are capable of living in their own homes. What advice are the Government giving local authorities and housing associations on an estimated reasonable percentage of new starts that should be adapted from the beginning to meet the needs of disabled people?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We give guidance through the Housing Corporation which, as he will know, has a role in overseeing the housing associations in ensuring flexibility in their programmes to provide for old people who want to stay in their own homes—something that we regard as very important.

Mr. Raynsford: Let me remind the Minister that, 20 years ago, in 1977, under a Labour Government, we started 81,000 council homes and 26,000 new housing association homes. Does he recognise that, in this last year of a discredited Tory Government, he cannot even forecast a single council start and can forecast only 26,000 housing association starts—exactly the same number as Labour achieved 20 years ago, minus the 81,000 council homes? Is not the fact that the Government have allowed the house building programme for social needs to fall to the lowest level since the end of the second world war an appalling comment on their neglect of their housing responsibilities?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman knows that we are meeting housing need. I take his contribution as a plea

for higher public expenditure. He wants to go further. He should know that his idea of releasing council receipts amounts to higher public expenditure. The hon. Gentleman and his party have not done their sums correctly on this issue. Such an idea counts towards higher public expenditure.

There is another problem for the hon. Gentleman. Contrary to what he was telling listeners in the London area over the weekend, there is no correlation, no matching, between housing need and capital receipts.

Mr. Raynsford: There is in London.

Mr. Clappison: Well, let me tell him that, in London, the three authorities that have the highest council receipts are Enfield, Merton, and London City. By contrast, Tower Hamlets and Lambeth have very few, and Southwark, Newham and Hackney have none at all. If that is the hon. Gentleman's idea of social geography in London, he has a very poor grasp of geography—almost as bad as his grasp of mathematics in not realising that his idea amounts to higher and higher public expenditure.

Local Authority Housing

6. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total sum allowed for local authority credit approvals for housing investment in 1996–97; and what are the figures for each of the past three years. [17007]

Mr. Curry: The totals are £789 million, £1,014 million, £893 million and £869 million.

Mr. McAvoy: When so many people are homeless or living in substandard accommodation, why are the Government cutting local authority capital investment programmes even further? Is it not time that the Government released, or started to consider releasing, the set-aside capital receipts, to boost local authority housing investment and help ordinary people?

Mr. Curry: It is interesting to see the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) asking a question about investment in English housing. I suppose that he is getting his practice in, because, if the Labour party came to power, he would not be able to ask questions about Scottish housing. The hon. Gentleman's proposals run into the sand in three or four ways. They would involve public expenditure, no matter how the books were rigged. As the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), has said, the need and the receipts do not match each other. For example, the extent to which Malvern Hills can invest is probably limited. There would have to be a massive redistribution and that would need primary legislation. The hon. Gentleman will not tell us how much he would spend, when he would spend it, or when he would legislate to spend it. The proposal is not worth a row of beans, let alone a row of semis.

Mr. David Shaw: Why is it that so many councillors believe that the capital receipts are sitting in some bank account, when local authorities have already taken them into their accounts and spent the money? It seems to be Labour councillors who believe in that mythical situation and who do not understand that the commitment by the Labour party to spend capital receipts would involve an extra £5 billion to £6 billion public expenditure on the public sector borrowing requirement.

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is right. The Labour party seems to think that the receipts are in an old sock under the mattress, but they are being used. They have been redirected into housing and housing revenue accounts, because otherwise rents and taxes would have to go up. That is a formula that Labour will not recognise. It is not a free option: it is an extremely expensive option. The Labour party would fiddle the accounts or betray its promise, and the latter is more likely.

Mr. Fraser: Has it not occurred to the Government that the less we invest in social housing, the more we pay exorbitant levels of private housing benefit, keep people in the poverty trap and push up unproductive public expenditure? Is that not nonsense as Government policy?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman could no doubt make out a case for increased public expenditure across the range of public services. His colleagues could make a case for an increase in spending on education or on health, but if the Government gave in to all the demands for increased public expenditure, the economy and interest rates would get out of control and we would become less competitive. We would then find ourselves in the position of too many of our continental partners, who cannot run their economies.

Opencast Mining

7. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against refusal by local authorities to approve opencast mining applications have been (a) heard and (b) successful since the changes to minerals planning guidance 3 in 1994. [17008]

The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones): Some 34 opencast coal appeals have been heard since MPG3 was revised in 1994 and, of those, nine have been successful.

Mr. Gunnell: Does the Minister accept that the present minerals planning guidance means that many local authorities are accepting applications, rather than going to appeal, often despite the wishes of local communities? Is he aware of the huge Windsor opencast site that threatens my constituents in Morley and people in the constituencies of Normanton, Batley and Dewsbury? Is it not true that the only way in which constituents can be sure that that application will not plague them for 15 years is for a Labour Government to be elected, so that our 10-point plan for opencasting can be implemented and local communities can resist developments that they do not want?

Mr. Jones: I note from that last remark that the hon. Gentleman is committing the Labour party to deciding planning issues before an application has even been submitted, much less determined by a local authority, considered at an independent inquiry by an inspector or reached the Secretary of State's desk. That

goes to show that the Labour party cannot be trusted with any judicial or semi-judicial system. The hon. Gentleman ought to know that all those issues have to be considered on their merits by local authorities and by the Secretary of State and that a balance has to be drawn between environmental and economic considerations.

Mrs. Peacock: My hon. Friend will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has visited the site and is well aware of local opposition in Batley and Spen. The hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) is wrong to say that we need a Labour Government to refuse permission: it is up to Labour-controlled Kirklees council.

Mr. Jones: As my hon. Friend clearly says, the mineral plannings authority is a Labour-controlled authority.

Local Government Finance

8. **Ms Hodge:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce changes to the formulae for the standard spending assessments. [17009]

9. **Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to begin discussions of standard spending assessments for 1998–99 with representatives of local government. [17010]

Sir Paul Beresford: The 1997–98 formula is set, and discussions on the 1998–99 formula will commence later this year.

Ms Hodge: Can the Minister explain how he and his Department can preside over a scheme that adjudges Westminster the fourth most deprived place in the country, while Barnsley, which has had 18 pit closures, lies 326th? Will he confirm that the way in which the deprivation indicators interact with the overseas visitors allowance means that more than one in 10 of the visitors who go to the Ritz or the Hilton are considered by the Government to be in overcrowded conditions, and therefore attract extra grant for Westminster? Is that not a tremendous funding fiddle for the few—the very few—Conservative-controlled councils?

Sir Paul Beresford: I am not as au fait with the Ritz as the hon. Lady obviously is. She has been involved in local government for many years, so she should know better than to come up with such gobbledegook. If the 1997–98 needs assessment for Westminster, in comparison with Liverpool, had been treated as Labour treated the 1979–80 assessment, Westminster's SSA would be £25 million more than it is; in other words, under those terms, Labour would have given each man, woman and child in Westminster £126 more.

Ms Corston: Will the Minister admit that, far from there being new money for education next year, many local education authorities will face a cash cut in central Government funding? Bristol city council will have to cut its spending by £4 million next year, leading to staff cuts and larger classes. Will the Minister admit that it is Government policy to hike up the council tax, so that ordinary families pay more and get less, and that blaming it on Labour councils simply will not work?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Lady's local authority is becoming a unitary authority and the Labour councillors, while talking about cuts, are planning a party to celebrate. They are raising their own pay by up to 66 per cent. and building a new £1 million council building. I understand that it is to be quite a delicate building, with turrets that have been described as reminiscent of a French chateau. Perhaps the councillors should get their act together and concentrate on providing opportunities for the people whom they should be serving.

Mr. Atkins: Does my hon. Friend accept that settlements for many areas, and especially Lancashire, have been more than generous for items such as education, largely as the result of pressure from Conservative Members of Parliament, in the face of opposition from incompetent county councils? Where does he think that the money that is being asked for by leaders of Lancashire county council will come from, when the shadow Chancellor and the Leader of the Opposition have said on the record that there will be no more money for local government?

Sir Paul Beresford: I congratulate my right hon. Friend who, along with other Conservative Members from the area, not only pressed the Government for money but encouraged local authorities to try to produce better value for money. That is the action that authorities must take now.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will my hon. Friend accept that the most objectionable feature of the formula for most people is that it cannot be easily understood? Does he accept that the doctrine of the Trinity is a kindergarten subject compared with local government finance? Can he offer any hope of enlightenment in the future?

Sir Paul Beresford: Perhaps I should offer to take my hon. Friend by the hand and give him a little guidance before we set the standard spending assessments for next year.

Mr. Dobson: Why will not the Government accept that what is needed is a fairer system than the present one, which so featherbeds Tory Westminster that millionaires in Mayfair pay less council tax than more than 7 million council taxpayers in other parts of the country—including, for example, in Coventry, where everyone with a house worth more than £40,000 pays more than a Mayfair millionaire? Do not Ministers realise that the present system is indefensible, which is why the incoming Labour Government will change it root and branch?

Sir Paul Beresford: That sounds like a doctrine of gerrymandering. The hon. Gentleman is talking about changing the system root and branch. He does not accept that it has been worked out carefully or that it is accepted by experts—but then he does not accept experts. He also fails to accept the meaning of the word "efficiency". If, in terms of its SSA, Camden were as efficient in 1996–97 as Westminster, his local residents would save £420.34. Harlow residents would get £48.73 back, Islington residents would get £520.04 back and Barking residents would get £293.06 back. I fail to see any understanding of the word "efficiency" on the part of the hon. Gentleman.

Environmental Crime

10. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the conclusions of his recent seminar on international environmental crime. [17011]

Mr. Gummer: Our recent seminar was very successful and will help the UK to continue to take the lead in combating environmental crime. We are working with our partners in the EU and beyond to intensify our efforts.

Mr. Tredinnick: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the smuggling of hazardous materials and CFCs is on the increase? What action was planned at the conference? What does he propose to do to combat this crime, which is of great concern to our constituents?

Mr. Gummer: We are certainly tightening the arrangements between the countries of the EU and within this nation, and this country has the most forward-looking system. But we want to ensure that we cover the areas of trafficking, most of it from the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Barry Jones: Is the diesel motor engine detrimental to public health? What is the state of the Department's research on the subject?

Mr. Gummer: I am not sure that that has much to do with environmental crime. Our air quality programme is better than that of any other country. We will get rid of both summer and winter smog within the next 10 years, so that once again we will be in the forefront of clean air policy.

Standard Spending Assessment (Rural Areas)

11. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to review the assessments of the needs of rural areas in the standard spending assessment formula. [17012]

Mr. Curry: We reviewed it last year and we have no plans to review it this year.

Mr. Greenway: That reply notwithstanding, does my right hon. Friend agree that the resources allocated to most rural district and county councils are substantially lower than those given to metropolitan councils? The Labour party can whinge and moan all it likes about resources for London boroughs, but does it not have a lot to learn from smaller councils about efficiency and managing on low resources? When can people in rural areas expect the same funding for their schools and other services as urban areas have had for years?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend represents a rural community, as I do, and he knows that we reviewed the system last year and were told that it was about right. In the circumstances, we maintained it; but it is absolutely true that too often metropolitan areas do not recognise that delivering services to sparsely populated areas is an expensive business. I will make sure that we continue to assess their needs objectively and meet them.

Mr. Tony Banks: Why do Conservative Members point at us as though Opposition Members do not represent rural areas, when many of us do? Does the Minister realise that part of my constituency, from Wanstead Flats to Epping Forest, is very rural? What recognition do we get for adding to people's delight at being able to visit rural areas? What has happened to the cattle of Wanstead Flats?

Mr. Curry: I have visited the hon. Gentleman's constituency, although not in an agricultural capacity. If he wishes to visit my constituency, I would be delighted to show him around; he might then understand the difference between countryside and countryside.

Local Government Finance (Warwickshire)

13. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the amount of standard spending assessment allocated to Warwickshire county council in each year since 1993. [17014]

Mr. Curry: Warwickshire county council's SSA has increased from £257 million to £279 million since 1993–94. During that period, there have, of course, been changes in the responsibilities of county councils, in particular in relation to police and to community care.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for his comprehensive answer, which clearly shows that spending on education will rise and that spending on the fire service will go up by about £800,000, or 8 per cent. Despite those substantial increases, does he agree that it is time the outdated, clumsy SSA procedure was abandoned for something fairer and more intelligible?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend may be interested to know that every local authority that makes representations about its SSA thinks that the system is unfair to it, and that whatever proposals it has are justifiable on entirely objective criteria. We have to find a system that we can keep up to date and that distributes resources effectively; we then need efficient local government.

Mr. Olner: The Minister knows that Warwickshire is a very efficient authority, as the district auditor has said. The Minister also knows that over the past three years Warwickshire has had to go over cap to provide its services. Will he assure us that when the authority sets its budget this year, and has to go over cap again because the Department has not taken into account the education disregard, the Government will allow it to do so?

Mr. Curry: When a local authority sets a budget over the cap, it can explain its reasons to the Government. We take them into consideration in determining whether to accept the higher budget or to require something lower. The same will happen again this year.

Local Government Finance

14. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the consultation process to determine the 1998–99 standard spending assessment. [17015]

Sir Paul Beresford: We propose to invite representatives of local government to discuss possible changes in standard spending assessments for 1998–99 in the usual way.

Mr. Heppell: Will the Minister make it clear during that consultation that if Nottingham were funded on the same basis as Westminster, band D council tax payers would not pay £809 a year but would get a rebate of £661?

Sir Paul Beresford: That is a possible question, but one could also ask why Nottingham cannot be as efficient as Westminster and save its band D council tax payers £135.47.

Mr. Allason: Does my hon. Friend recognise that there is a problem with SSAs in respect of tourism? Is he aware that there is a difficulty with standard bed nights, with visitor bed nights and with day visitors? When Torbay's local authority gains unitary status, will he at least reconsider the criteria on which day visitor numbers are counted so that they can be included with visitor bed nights?

Sir Paul Beresford: As ever, I shall consider all sensible suggestions. My hon. Friend's suggestion seems as if it may be one that we may examine carefully.

15. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on inequities in the current funding formula for local government; and if he will make a statement. [17016]

Sir Paul Beresford: What one authority considers an inequity, another often considers entirely justified.

Mr. Simpson: I understand how difficult it must be to have Mayfair and Park lane and the poverty associated with those areas in one's borough, but is not the unfairness of today's formula the fact that the real benefits tourists in Britain are the rich in the Ritz? They are the ones whom the Government's tax subsidises, at a cost to almost every other local authority in Britain and every other council tax payer.

Sir Paul Beresford: What the hon. Gentleman forgets is that the factor that he criticises in respect of Westminster, if adjusted, would necessitate a similar adjustment for Chester, York, Cambridge and Durham. He should recognise that, contrary to what has been suggested by Labour Front Benchers, one cannot gerrymander the system.

Mr. Congdon: Rather than whingeing, would it not be better if local authorities got on and managed their services better? In that context, will my hon. Friend encourage local authorities to place more elderly people in the private sector and hence save nearly £750 million a year, instead of discriminating in favour of their own homes?

Sir Paul Beresford: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—like many of us, he has to live with Croydon council. Many Conservative councils have overcome the difficulty that he describes by using the private sector, being imaginative and using lateral thinking.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 March. [17031]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Soley: Does the Prime Minister agree that, if the negotiations in Northern Ireland result in a devolved assembly, Members of Parliament for Northern Ireland should continue to be able to speak and vote in this House on matters affecting England, Scotland and Wales? If he does agree with that, why would it not be a threat to the Union?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman is confusing the powers that are likely to go to a Northern Ireland Assembly with those proposed for a Scottish Assembly. As he knows, they are not remotely comparable.

Mr. Soley *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but they are not comparable. That is why his corollary is the wrong one.

Mr. Budgen: Will my right hon. Friend agree that one of the great successes of the past 18 years has been the strict control of immigration, which has much reduced racial tension in this country? Will he condemn the proposals, even by new Labour, to abolish the primary purpose rule and to grant immigration rights to the extended family? Does he agree that that will increase racial tension and create resentment even among sections of the Asian community?

The Prime Minister: In the past 18 years, we have seen the most extraordinary changes and improvements in race relations in this country. I think that is immensely important. I am certainly not going to lend my voice or my policy to anything that would damage that improvement.

Mr. Blair: The Prime Minister deserves credit for that answer. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must come to order. Mr. Jamieson.

Mr. Blair: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Does the Prime Minister agree, following the past 48 hours, that it would be better for the Secretary of State for Health to concentrate on dealing with the crisis in the national health service, rather than adding to the crisis in the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend has done a great deal to improve services in the NHS, and he has also tackled many social service matters that required

examination and improvement. I think that he has been an outstanding Secretary of State for Health, and I believe that many people who are treated in the health service these days appreciate the improvements that have occurred.

Mr. Blair: Will the Prime Minister at least accept the evidence contained in a report due to be published on Thursday? A survey of 300 accident and emergency departments across the country shows that many are in acute and chronic crisis and that many simply cannot make do. The survey says that the problem has been made worse by the Conservatives' internal market reforms.

If the Prime Minister is to stumble on in office until 1 May, would it not be better for Ministers to use that time not playing games about who the next Tory leader will be but showing real leadership and tackling the problems facing the country?

The Prime Minister: Over the past five years, as we have tackled the problems facing the country, we have had nothing but opposition from the Labour party. Whatever fresh proposition was put forward—whether for health, education or controlling public spending—we could be certain that the Labour party would oppose it, and it did.

The fact is that we are creating a modern health service fit for the 21st century. Instead of carping about the health service, it would make a change if the Opposition offered some constructive proposals because, as yet, we have seen none. They say that they oppose bureaucracy, but they opposed us when we abolished the entire regional health tier. They say that hospitals are underfunded, but they will not match our pledge to increase funds. They say that they would increase efficiency, but they would abolish our reforms and set up a new tier of bureaucracy. The very last thing that the national health service needs is an ideological Labour Government causing chaos and disruption.

Mr. Blair: The very problem that the health service has had is an ideological Tory Government causing difficulties. That is why we have 20,000 more managers and 50,000 fewer nurses. If the Prime Minister believes his case on the health service, education and other issues, let him have the courage of his convictions and put the matter to the country now.

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly be taking our case on the health service and other matters to the country. I look forward to discussing the reality of what has been done in the health service.

It is no good the right hon. Gentleman saying that he seeks to improve the health service. The Opposition opposed national health service trusts, which are delivering better hospitals; they opposed fundholders, which are transforming primary care; and they attacked managers despite the fact that, before the reforms, no one could tell anyone where the money was going in the national health service.

The Opposition also attacked compulsory competitive tendering, despite the fact that it is saving millions of pounds that can go to patient care; and they are committed to a minimum wage, without saying how much it would cost the health service and whether they would fund it. The Opposition will not match our pledge to increase funds in real terms for the health service in each successive year of the next Conservative Government.

Sir Michael Shersby: Is my right hon. Friend aware that accidents involving NHS employees are costing £154 million a year, according to evidence given to the Public Accounts Committee only few days ago? Will he therefore ask the Health and Safety Executive to ensure that the guidance given by the national health service executive to hospitals is put into practice? That would lead to great savings from fewer accidents; that money could be redeployed to acquire more nurses, more doctors and more services.

The Prime Minister: We are certainly keen to ensure that the money goes to patient services. That is happening increasingly now that we know how the money is being spent in the health service—before our reforms, we did not have that information. Of course I shall ask my right hon. Friend to consider my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Mr. Ashdown: When last week the Prime Minister instructed members of the Conservative party to start the fight back immediately, did he expect them to take him quite so literally? Lord Tebbit attacks the Deputy Prime Minister, Lord McAlpine seeks to duff up the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary seems to want to take on the whole Cabinet. In deciding how to deal with these delinquents, has the Prime Minister ever considered making use of secure accommodation and electronic tagging?

The Prime Minister: If that is an indication from the right hon. Gentleman that he does support measures such as electronic tagging, I am pleased that in some areas he is moving towards the Government's policy.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend agree with the proposition propounded by the post-war Labour Government that constitutional measures should always be taken in Committee on the Floor of the House?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I do. That has been the constitutional position in this House. It is the way in which matters have normally been handled. I cannot conceive that anyone would wish to change that long-established tradition.

Q2. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 March. [17032]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Winnick: Is Lord McAlpine correct to say that the Prime Minister asked him to collect a very large sum of money and that the person concerned turned out to be a Greek shipping tycoon, a very dubious character who had supported the Greek military dictatorship? Do the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and the Attorney-General feel any responsibility for the fact that stolen money—and it is stolen money—from Asil Nadir is being used by the Conservative party for its election campaign? Should not all those matters be referred to the Nolan committee?

The Prime Minister: The Labour party has just been canvassing for resources in the United States, presumably from overseas donors. It is interesting to hear the hon. Gentleman, of all Members of the House, propounding the idea that it is acceptable to take money from Americans but not from people of other nationalities, were it to be offered. If he is concerned about funding, he should concern himself with the funding of his leader's office and his deputy leader's office, and with the trade unions buying votes in the Labour party.

Mr. Luff: Is it not all really rather simple, when properly understood? Can my right hon. Friend confirm that this country has the most successful economy of any major country in Europe? Are not the Government determined to protect the interests of the United Kingdom in Europe and to protect the unity of the United Kingdom and its interests and influence throughout the world, and would not all that be put at risk by the Labour party's policies?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right about that. The most important element of the economy's success is the fact that success and growth yield the resources to fund the services, such as education and health, that we wish to improve but which could not be improved without an improving economy.

Q3. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 March. [17033]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Jackson: Following the very decisive statement by the voters of Wirral last week, will the Prime Minister take the opportunity today to redeem his long-established reputation for indecisiveness and tell us whether the election will be on 1 May?

The Prime Minister: I warmly congratulate the new hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) on his success, but I would advise him not to unpack his bags.

Mr. Richards: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the rate of unemployment in every constituency in Wales is lower than that in Germany and France? Does he agree that if the United Kingdom were to copy the European social model, as the Dollies opposite would have us do, unemployment in Wales would double?

The Prime Minister: The levels of unemployment have fallen dramatically across the United Kingdom over recent years, as a result of the policies that we have followed. For example, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), they have fallen by 25 per cent., and by 36 per cent. in the constituency of the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). Unemployment has fallen by 31 per cent. in Sheffield, and by 40 per cent. in Sedgefield. On the back of that, one would expect the Opposition to agree that the policies that we have been following create jobs, whereas the policies that they are following have created unemployment across Europe.

Q4. **Mr. Ilsley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 March. [17034]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ilsley: Would the Prime Minister care to comment on the attack by Lord Tebbit on his Deputy Prime Minister, whom he described as

"tasteless, tacky if not dishonourable, and self-centred"?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister replied for himself quite adequately on that matter.

NEW MEMBER

The following Member took and subscribed the Oath:

James Keith Chapman Esq., for Wirral, South

United Kingdom Membership of European Union (Research)

3.32 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require Her Majesty's Government to carry out research into alternatives to the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union.

The future of our people in Europe will be determined by the age-old principle: united we stand, divided we fall.

The British are ambivalent about Europe. Nothing that has yet been proposed will resolve their feelings. Indeed, the referendum that has been proposed will tell us only that we are divided, which we already know. We need solutions to the dilemma. Most of all, we need real changes in Europe that can harness the support of all the people in our country. We owe it to those whose livelihoods depend on Europe to ensure that we achieve the changes in Europe that would bring more of the country alongside them.

How do we scale the mountain necessary to persuade our friends in Europe that we need change, and that their venture, European unity, is likely to crumble to dust unless they address and resolve some of our difficulties with European development?

The only way to move mountains is with power, and the only power that we have among the 15 members of the European Union is ultimately the strength of our arguments.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Valedictory speech.

Mr. Booth: It may be a valedictory speech, but it is an important one.

The first step is to find the national argument that can win all the support of Britain—and the unity of the nation is vital. Those two aspects must go together, and my Bill is one part of the argument: a piece in the jigsaw to win. I seek to support our leaders when they argue our case for change in Europe. Officials in the Foreign Office agree that, if we are to negotiate changes to answer legitimate complaints, we need to strengthen our negotiating arm. This is no time to groan; it is time to be constructive on Europe.

Our problem is not Europe itself. Our problem is that we were not there in 1957, as part of the foundation of the venture, and it has been made worse by the fact that policies have been made and directions taken since then that have made the problems chronic and the solutions therefore more difficult to find. I do not share the view that there is no solution, however; I believe that we must find a solution.

The problem is not about sceptics. In a sense, there is no such thing as a sceptic: there are only people who complain, and yet find no answer. My modest Bill is my contribution to what I believe to be one of the most important debates that the House has had in 700 years. I seek to strengthen the hand of our leaders in two ways—first by giving them a strong card to play, and secondly by increasing unity behind the Prime Minister in his quest to promote a partnership among free nation states. Negotiation, even between friends—even in a family of nations—can be tough. I make no apology if my proposals sound tough; if on occasion it is necessary to be cruel to be kind, it is sometimes also necessary to be tough to achieve harmony.

My Bill proposes that the Government should research viable alternatives to our membership of the European Union. Others may be suggested, but I happen to believe that there is only one that would be in keeping with the worldwide horizon of the British people—the development of global free trade through the World Trade Organisation. That would make regional trade arrangements, such as the European model, a stepping stone to world prosperity, and greater prosperity beyond that. When I went to Geneva to research the matter earlier this year, I was satisfied that the WTO would, in the end, have the strength to give Britain a viable alternative to the EU.

How can that help us? Why does a viable ability to leave the EU without damaging our economic interests strengthen our negotiating power? There are two reasons. First, I do not believe that there is a Member of Parliament who has not been faced with the argument that the train has left the station, and that we have no choice but to stay or else become Norway mark 2. I believe that the one chance of a new start in Europe is to demonstrate that our whole regional exercise in Europe could, in the next decade or so, be shunted into the sidings by global free trade and global arrangements. Making their arrangements more effective could be seen by those in Europe as vital to avoiding relegation to the second league.

Secondly, we sell ourselves short all the time. Our partners in Europe have strong reasons to keep us in their sphere of influence. We are their export market: in every case, we are just about their principal export market. Two years ago, Germany exported £6 billion more to us than we exported to it. It needs us in Europe, and we should use that card. Rather than promoting our departure, it is likely that my proposal will cement the ties that we have in Europe, through a stronger negotiating position and the ability to reflect the changes required by our people. If Europe can deflect itself from various policies that we find irksome, everyone will win.

There is no time in this short speech for me to list the changes that are needed, but the European Court, the common agricultural policy and fisheries policy would be on my personal shopping list. I stress, however, that I am not presenting the Bill to promote our departure from the EU. On the contrary, I am presenting it to say that those who often appear deaf to the British point of view should listen to our plans. I am presenting it to be constructive and positive. We must show our friends—yes, friends—in Europe that some change will assist them too, because it will buttress a common venture. I believe that the tide of freely expressed anxiety—the tide demanding change—will sweep away even the finest ambitions unless Britain is in Europe, to play our part and to contribute our version of common sense. Rhetoric helps no one, but successful negotiation among friends certainly does.

I commend my Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Hartley Booth, Mr. Bob Dunn, Sir Ralph Howell, Sir Sydney Chapman, Sir Teddy Taylor, Mr. Nicholas Budgen, Mr. William Cash, Mr. Andrew Robathan, Mr. Bernard Jenkin, Mr. David Amess and Mr. David Lidington.

United Kingdom Membership of European Union (Research)

Mr. Hartley Booth accordingly presented a Bill to require Her Majesty's Government to carry out research into alternatives to the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 128].

Local Government Finance (Scotland)

3.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): I beg to move,

That the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1997, dated 12th February 1997, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

Madam Speaker: I understand that with this, it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1997, dated 12th February 1997, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the Special Grant Report (Scotland) on Supplementary Mismatch Scheme Grant for 1997–98 (HC 272), which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the Special Grant Report (Scotland) on Grant in aid of building works at Dunblane Primary School and Grant in aid of Local Authority revenue costs resulting from the Dunblane tragedy (HC 273), which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

Mr. Kynoch: This afternoon, the House has its annual opportunity to debate the Government's financial settlement for Scottish local authorities. It is an important day—a day when I would have expected the Opposition Benches to be filled. I note, however, that they are singularly empty at present. I trust that greater interest will be shown as time goes on.

I realise the quandary that the Opposition are in this afternoon, because a poll in *The Herald* this morning shows a 6 per cent. drop in support in Scotland for the Labour party; and the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has at last realised that cutting administration and bureaucracy is an area that should be considered. He proposes to do that in the health service, but what has he done in the months and years past, in local government? Absolutely nothing. Yet his party controls local government in Scotland. The Labour party has said that there is no more money for local government, and Labour Members are here to debate that issue with us. We have said that there is plenty of funding for local government.

The purpose of the debate is to approve a package of legislation that deals with Scottish local authority funding. I propose therefore to begin by briefly introducing each element of the package.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I seek a straightforward explanation. Why is the Minister withdrawing £350 million from Scottish local authorities, and threatening some 17,000 jobs, which will increase council taxes and council rents? As Scotland will subsidise the United Kingdom by some £12.5 billion over the next five years, why is he doing that?

Mr. Kynoch: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would come up with something better than the old story of surpluses. Unfortunately, he is unable to understand the budget deficit between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

The Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1997 is accompanied by a report that sets out in detail the way in which the figures have been arrived at. It has been

[Mr. Kynoch]

subject to extensive consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I shall be happy to expand on any points of detail that hon. Members wish to raise.

The next order before us is the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1997, which is also accompanied by an explanatory report. The figures have again been calculated on a basis agreed with COSLA. Overall, the order provides for the payment to local government of a net sum of £2.73 million.

The Special Grant Report (Scotland) on Supplementary Mismatch Scheme Grant for 1997–98 is the second such report. The proposed grant payments for 1997–98 ensure that the 10 councils will be protected for 50 per cent. of their mismatch. The report provides for the payment of special grant totalling £14.19 million next year, £6.97 million of which will go to Glasgow city council.

Lastly, hon. Members will see that we are also seeking their approval for the Special Grant Report (Scotland) on grant in aid of building works at Dunblane primary school and grant in aid of local authority revenue costs resulting from the Dunblane tragedy. We estimate that the first of those grants will amount to £2.091 million, and the second to £2.073 million. The report sets out how we have determined the amounts of grant that will be paid and their purpose. It is the product of close liaison with the council since the horrific events of last March. The report requires the formal approval of the House, which I hope it will obtain in a way that spares the community undue further attention.

So much for the detail of our proposals. I expect that, as in previous years, the overall local government finance settlement rather than the specifics of the orders and reports is likely to dominate the debate. We shall doubtless hear the usual, totally predictable complaints. Opposition Members, COSLA and virtually every local authority constantly complain that Scottish local government is underfunded, and that next year's settlement will require councils to cut expenditure.

It bears repeating as often as those claims are made that nothing could be further from the truth. Contrary to all the talk of cuts next year, next year's settlement allows every single council in Scotland to increase expenditure compared with the current year. It also bears repeating until the message has hit home that the overall settlement provides for an increase of more than £140 million, or 2.2 per cent., in local government expenditure. That is before any account is taken of the scope for efficiency savings.

At the same time, the level of Government support for that expenditure has been increased by more than £60 million, which is £46 million more than local government expected to receive, when it considered its planned expenditure for next year as outlined last year.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): The Minister has given local authorities, such as Glasgow city council, new burdens of additional expenditure for the police and for community care.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman came to see me last Friday, with representatives of Glasgow city council. It was an interesting meeting, because Glasgow city council receives £21 million of mismatch funding, partly through the self-finance mismatch funding scheme and partly from the almost £7 million that it receives in supplementary top-up, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State introduced last year. Glasgow said that in this year's expenditure, it would be able to pay off a deficit of £9 million. That means that Glasgow city council has £10 million extra expenditure that it can incur while staying within its capping limit, plus £9 million that it seems to have accumulated, so that it can pay off a deficit this year. Therefore, the council has the possibility to increase its budget by some £19 million. Of course, that does not stop the council, because it says that it still has to make further cuts of some £80 million. That shows that it is looking to increase its budget by some £99 million. At a time when inflation is running at between 2 per cent. and 3 per cent., that budget increase would be in excess of 10 per cent. That is unreasonable.

Glasgow has had a fair deal. When Councillor Gould came to see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last year and pleaded for some extra help to buy time to get his expenditure into line with revenue, Councillor Gould knew perfectly well what was going to happen to the funding of Glasgow city council this year. I give him credit for the fact that he seems to have been able to pay off a deficit this year. It appears that he seems, if what he says is right, to have managed to get his expenditure into line with budget, so I fail to understand why he is seeking to increase his budget now by more than 10 per cent.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): The Minister will recall the detailed discussion that Glasgow Members and city council representatives had with him on Friday. I am sure that, if he recalls that discussion, he will remember that, although there was a £9 million surplus this year, that still leaves the council with an £80 million deficit and having to sack up to 2,000 workers and cut services accordingly. Does he still think that Glasgow is trying to spend more money? It is struggling to avoid spending far less and wrecking services.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Lady has not been listening to what I have said about Glasgow city council. My point is this. It appears that next year it is seeking to spend almost £100 million more than this year, but when I mentioned at the meeting some of the information that I had received as a result of asking Councillor Gould about his councillors' travel arrangements in the past year, I noticed that certain hon. Members rose very quickly to their feet.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): Rose.

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend mentions the word "rose". That could lead me to give some of the details. Hon. Members heard me say that, when I looked through the analysis of councillors' visits to conferences and trips abroad, I found that two councillors went to Rostov-on-Don for the Rostov city days event—what that has to do with Glasgow I fail to understand—

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kynoch: In a minute. I did not mention the hon. Gentleman, but I was referring to him, and I shall give way in just a minute, because he may be able to justify those trips, at a time when Glasgow city council is

advocating significant cuts—his words, not mine—in service delivery. There were two trips to the Rostov city days event, one to St. Petersburg for a symposium on cultural policy in Europe and another to an international rose exhibition in Rome. Lastly, I fail to understand why a councillor from Glasgow city council went all the way to Hong Kong for a meeting of the International Badminton Federation, when the council is talking about cutting services.

Mr. Martin: The Minister was referring to me and to the comments that I made. He should have been fair, because I invited him to have a debate on the Floor of the House about trips abroad, so that we could talk about some of the trips that Conservative Members go on, which are so strange that the Privileges Committee has had to examine them. I speak as a Member who has not been abroad in this Parliament. I say to the Minister: hold a debate, when we can talk about everyone's trips abroad. It is a scandal that the Privileges Committee has had to examine hon. Members who have brought shame on the House.

Mr. Kynoch: I understand the hon. Gentleman trying to divert the debate from what I was talking about, which is what is going on in Glasgow city council, but it might interest him to know that I have made two trips abroad in the past 18 months. From one, I brought back 4,300 jobs after inward investment by Chunghwa Picture Tubes and, from the other, 500 jobs were created at the Lexmark company in Rosyth. I believe in spending money wisely, in the interests of my responsibilities. I find it difficult to understand the expenditure to which I referred, at a time when Glasgow city council is asking its electorate for a 22 per cent. increase in council tax and talking about cutting services.

If the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) does not like to hear about foreign trips, I refer him to the fact that Glasgow city council proposes to spend £500,000 celebrating the centenary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress. How does it plan to do it? It proposes to be environmentally friendly and pour red dye into the Clyde. What on earth that will do for the good citizens of Glasgow, I fail to understand. In addition, it has spent £810,000 on 28 cars for the council and about £500,000 on legal costs, trying to bust the conditions attached to the Burrell bequest. That is quite inexplicable from a council that is seeking to cut services to its council tax payers, but it is only to be expected from the prospective candidates for the tax-raising Parliament that Labour and the Liberal Democrats wish to set up after the election, if, God forbid, they ever come to power.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): As the Minister is comparing trips abroad with cuts in public spending at home, how does he justify the Minister responsible for housing in Scotland going to Atlanta to watch the Olympic games, after imposing one of the worst ever housing settlements on Scotland and making more vicious cuts in housing expenditure? What connection is there between the Olympic games and housing in Scotland?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman failed to remind the House that my hon. Friend is also the Minister responsible for sport in Scotland, and one of his functions is to ensure good and successful sporting activity. The meetings that he held in Atlanta contributed to his current thinking about the future of sport in Scotland. I should have hoped that the hon. Gentleman, who I thought was a football fanatic, would appreciate the fact that my hon. Friend was taking a healthy interest in his subject.

What badminton in Hong Kong or a rose exhibition in Rome had to do with Glasgow city council, however, I fail to understand.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Does my hon. Friend agree that had the Minister responsible for sport in Scotland not gone to Atlanta to support Scottish competitors in the Olympic games, all hell would have broken loose among the Opposition? We like our Ministers to represent Scotland at major sporting events, as I did at the Commonwealth games.

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. As he is a former Sports Minister and was once a successful rugby player, he knows only too well the need for the best possible information about sport.

I do not wish to be diverted too far on the issue of sport. Let me return to Glasgow city council.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie) *rose—*

Mr. Kynoch: If it is on Glasgow city council, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Worthington: I really must appeal to the Minister to treat the matter with great seriousness. We have lost hundreds of jobs throughout Scotland, services have been cut and there have been massive increases in council tax. If we have a successful economy in Scotland, why can we not afford the same services this year as last year?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman talks about treating the matter seriously. I consider it to be exceedingly serious, and that is why I have had meetings with councils and with right hon. and hon. Members. I am disappointed by the fact that it was apparent at those meetings that hon. Members had not understood the councils' intentions. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should know that if we did not have capping, as is Labour policy, Glasgow city council would not be asking for a 22 per cent. increase in council tax. The council would go to council tax payers and ask for a 62 per cent. increase. That is a disgraceful way in which to run a council—it is attempting to increase expenditure by more than 11 per cent.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Does the Minister really understand local government finance? It is obvious that he does not understand the city of Glasgow, which has been eroded and become riddled by years of Conservative government, crime, drugs and homelessness. Medical reports such as the Black report show that the infant mortality rate in Glasgow is the worst in Europe. That is the Government's record. The Minister does not understand finance. In his letter to the provost, he wrote about "aggregate finance", "specific needs" and "needs and resources elements". He aggregated those elements, and it cost Glasgow millions of pounds.

Mr. Kynoch: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman takes that view, because he showed a singular lack of

[Mr. Kynoch]

knowledge of local government finance when leading the delegation that met me last Friday. The facts of life are that Glasgow city council may well have the problems that he mentioned. However, he fails to recognise the fact—although it is staring him in the face—that the Labour party has been in control of Glasgow city council and has created those conditions, because it cannot prioritise spending in the best interests of council tax payers.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kynoch: Conservative Members are responsible, and they attempt to ensure that taxpayers' hard-earned funds are spent wisely, to achieve cost-effective service delivery within local government.

Dr. Godman *rose—*

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kynoch: I give way to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

Madam Speaker: Order. Too many hon. Members are attempting to intervene at the same time. Only one hon. Member should be on his feet at a time, and that is the Minister, unless he gives way.

Mr. Dalyell: If I have heard the Minister wrongly, forgive me. I thought that, in his outburst, he referred to busting the conditions of the Burrell bequest. Would this be an appropriate moment to ask what the Government's policy is on the very difficult matter of the Burrell bequest? Are the Government really in favour of "busting" its conditions?

Mr. Kynoch: As I understood the position—although I shall attempt to clarify it—the conditions attached to the Burrell bequest are a responsibility of the trustees, not of the Government. However, I am concerned that Glasgow city council is attempting to break the conditions of the Burrell bequest and, in doing so, incurring expenditure of up to £500,000 of council tax payers' funds. If that is the case, I question whether that is funding well spent, at a time when Glasgow is—

Dr. Godman *rose—*

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kynoch: I should like to move on, but I am happy to see such healthy interest on the Opposition Benches. I shall give way.

Mr. Maxton: I wonder where the Minister gets the figure of £500,000, whereas the council says that, at the maximum, it is £90,000? That is the sum. Why is the Minister trying to tell us that it is £500,000 when it is not?

Mr. Kynoch: I very carefully said "up to £500,000", and I hope that the figure—if anything—would be significantly less. The councillors who came to see me with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) clearly should be attempting to spend council tax payers' funds and central taxation in a wise manner, so that their council tax payers have good delivery of service. At that meeting, however, when we analysed the request, they made it clear that what they effectively wanted was £50 million more, to be given to Glasgow city council. They already have £21 million more, through the two mismatch schemes.

Would hon. Members representing areas covered by the other new local authorities in the former Strathclyde region—East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire—be happy for an extra £50 million to be taken from their funding, to go to Glasgow? That is what the Glasgow councillors were arguing to me. They said that the distribution of funds did not favour Glasgow adequately and that more money should come from those areas outside Glasgow.

Dr. Godman: Clause 4 of the Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill places additional responsibilities on fire authorities to deal with emergencies at sea. What discussions have there been between the Scottish Office and the Department of Transport about that additional burden to be placed on our fire authorities? Was there any discussion about the funding of training of firemen for the extra duties and the provision of extra equipment?

Mr. Kynoch: The grant-aided expenditure on fire has been increased considerably. There are always discussions with the authorities to ensure adequate funding.

I allowed myself to be slightly diverted by the detail of Glasgow. I wanted to conclude by saying that local government has been treated favourably in last year's public expenditure survey.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I was waiting for the Minister to move on from talking about Glasgow. How does he account for the fact that Argyll and Bute council is facing £8.5 million of cuts as it tries to meet the commitments inherited from Strathclyde regional council? Some £3.5 million of those cuts are in education. We are facing the closure of three more schools, two of which are on an island. Why can the Minister not help Argyll and Bute?

Mr. Kynoch: I am able to do something for Argyll and Bute. The hon. Lady will be aware that there has been disagreement among the local authorities about the disaggregation of the former Strathclyde budget. The Scottish Office has always said that it was for the local authorities to decide about that distribution. After a lot of effort in trying to persuade West Dunbartonshire council to accept an independent arbiter—a point raised by the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) when he came with a council delegation to see me—I am delighted to say that the arbiter has worked incredibly quickly and has come up with a figure, which I believe has been agreed with Argyll and Bute and West Dunbartonshire. Argyll and Bute should be able to spend more than £500,000 extra this year within its capping limit. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce that officially to the council later this afternoon.

At the recent meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Montrose, my right hon. Friend challenged any Opposition Member who thought the settlement inadequate to say which Scottish Office programmes they would cut to give more to local government. Predictably, Labour Members ran a mile to avoid answering. They could not answer, because the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has decreed that there will be no increase in public expenditure, and therefore no extra expenditure in Scotland on local government.

I understand that the hon. Member for Hamilton, who will be opening for the Opposition, is now considering how to redistribute funding. I should delighted if he is really talking about getting his Labour councils to start looking at making themselves more cost-effective, and spreading local authority expenditure away from the centre, the bureaucracy and administration, and out to the front-line delivery of service, because that is what we believe in. We believe in cost-effective delivery of service.

Perhaps the Labour party finds it easier to act simply as a postbox for the misleading claims that local authorities are being compelled to cut services—without examining what is really going on. Labour Members have doubtless been briefed by councils and COSLA on the scale of cuts—as they call them—that they claim will have to be made. I should, however, be pleasantly surprised to find that Labour Members had examined such claims at all carefully. I have examined the claims very carefully indeed. As I said, I have also had the opportunity to discuss the claims face to face with a number of council representatives, including those from Glasgow and Argyll and Bute, which revealed an absolutely fascinating fact.

Councils are claiming that they need to increase their spending by about £500 million this year, just to stand still. That is half a billion pounds on top of any efficiency savings that they can make, or an increase of 8 per cent. on current spending, at a time when inflation is only about a third of that. If capping were not in place, that £500 million would mean an increase in the council tax in Scotland of no less than 42 per cent.—by mostly Labour-controlled councils. Yet the Labour party believes that if it ever came to office, it would not put up taxes. The Labour party is the party of spend and tax, as we are seeing in local government in Scotland. Its assertion is an extraordinary one, which I cannot believe any sensible person would take at face value.

Mrs. Fyfe: As the Minister's words a moment ago showed that he disbelieved the claims made by councils, is he telling us that he is predicting that there will be no redundancies in Glasgow in the provision of essential services?

Mr. Kynoch: Glasgow city council must face up to facts; that is the long and the short of it. The hon. Lady does not of course understand. I assume that exactly the same distribution of central funding, through a formula agreed jointly in the distribution committee between COSLA and the Scottish Office, would be in operation should the Labour party ever come to power.

I have sought to find out whether COSLA wants to change the method of distribution. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to the president of COSLA, asking whether he agrees with the desire of the hon. Member for Hamilton to have an independent look at the distribution of funds from the centre. The hon. Gentleman is in total opposition to COSLA, because COSLA's president said that he was more than happy with the distribution committee.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State went a stage further and suggested that perhaps it was time to take the responsibility for the distribution of funds away from the distribution committee; perhaps a totally independent body should consider distribution, so that people in Glasgow and hon. Members who represent Glasgow could feel that the process was independent. Yet COSLA, which is largely made up of the Labour party in Scotland, says that it is happy with the distribution. There is the most incredible split in the Scottish Labour party, which is only too apparent in local government finance.

Mr. Wray: Does the Minister agree that, last year, Glasgow council made cuts of £68 million and increased the council tax by 25 per cent.? Does he further agree that, this year, in order to meet the Minister's capping level, it will have to increase its council tax by another 25 per cent., sack 2,000 employees and cut some services by 10 per cent. and some smaller services by 15 per cent. and 20 per cent?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman has forgotten what happened last year, when Councillor Gould struck a deal with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The deal was that my right hon. Friend would guarantee to give extra funding to Glasgow and other so-called mismatch losers if they agreed to bring expenditure into line with revenue. It is up to the councils how they organise their funds. Last year, Glasgow's budget was some £843 million, and the council could prioritise its spending within that budget, to ensure good service delivery.

Last year, the councillors talked about cuts, but again they increased expenditure over the year before. The hon. Member for Provan fails to recognise, from what the councillors told me on Friday, that they are able to increase expenditure on service delivery by some £19 million this year. The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but officials were concerned by the questions that I asked at the meeting. The councillors told me that they would not be in deficit at the end of the year. Indeed, they said that they would be in surplus, so that they could pay off £9 million of budget deficit inherited from the former Strathclyde council. That means that they spent some £9 million less on service delivery than they expected, so they probably have a flexibility of £9 million within their capping limit, which can be added to the £10 million increase, giving some £19 million. The long and the short of it is that Glasgow has had a good settlement. Glasgow must recognise that for years, under a Labour administration, it has prioritised its expenditure out of line with the people's needs and has not ensured good service delivery. It is time that Labour Members recognised that.

I have yet to have a satisfactory explanation from councils or from the Labour party, of why councils should need the enormous increase that they want. By the councils' admission, the increase would not be used to enhance or improve the services that they provide—it would be used to stay where they are. That is hardly an attractive sales pitch. I can conclude only that they have a spending wish list and that talk of cuts is simply deplorable scaremongering.

[Mr. Kynoch]

I have heard tales of councils varying their claims of expected council tax increases. Edinburgh made the most ridiculous claims not many weeks ago, but it is now talking of a council tax increase of some 3 per cent. The stories are scaremongering and nothing more. Certain councils have created unnecessary alarm among the more vulnerable members of the population, and that is sad. I condemn that, because it does no service to the cause of local government.

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): Does the Minister remember that I brought a delegation of Midlothian councillors to meet him? He disagreed with our claims about the way in which the money was redistributed by COSLA, but the reduction of £3 million in grant aid to Midlothian is a fact and is equivalent to a 16 per cent. increase in council tax. Nobody challenged our figures at the meeting—merely the way in which they were calculated.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman brought a delegation to see me, and I welcomed our discussion. I pointed out to the Midlothian councillors that they were permitted to increase their expenditure, within the capping limit, by some 3.17 per cent. this year. That takes into account the public expenditure policy on pay and salaries—that awards should be funded from efficiency improvements—so councillors have 3.17 per cent. more to spend on services, and there is absolutely no reason for cuts. The hon. Gentleman is a Whip, so perhaps he should ask his colleagues on the Front Bench what funding they would give local government if ever they came to power.

Throughout all the discussions of the past weeks, Opposition Members have complained about cuts and insufficient funding for local government, as they have done year on year on year, yet this year there has been a strange silence from the Opposition Front Bench. That silence was leaked by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) when he said to people at a party meeting in Dundee that they might not believe it, but Labour was going into the next general election campaign advocating no increase in expenditure.

That may be a major problem for the Labour party, but I cannot help that. We have given increased funding to local government, which occupies about 37 per cent. of the Scottish Office bloc. Once again, I challenge the hon. Member for Hamilton to say what he would give to local government, and where he would take it from, if he were on Government Benches.

Local government benefits from reasoned, realistic, informed debate. I hope that we shall have that this afternoon; from the interventions that I have taken so far, I find that difficult to believe, but I live in hope. To shed more light on the matter, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I commissioned the local authority current expenditure study, which was published last month. Copies of the report were sent to all Scottish Members. Hon. Members have now had time to study what my right hon. Friend rightly described as a major and important piece of work.

The study was carried out entirely independently of Government, by Coopers and Lybrand and Pieda. After going to great lengths to ensure that it was comparing like with like, the report concluded that spending levels across a wide range of services were higher—in some cases, very much so—than in England or Wales.

The report completely destroys the myth that Scottish local government is underfunded. One of its many interesting points is that the much higher spending levels have been consistent over the past 10 years, despite all the claims by Opposition Members that the Government have starved Scottish local government of resources.

Critically, the consultants question the extent to which issues that are often cited as "explaining" the much higher levels of expenditure in Scotland, such as sparsity, deprivation and unemployment, are genuinely significant. Opposition Members may want to think seriously about that before launching into this debate.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear that the Government are committed to a second-stage study, the main objective of which would be to get behind the figures that have been published and explore further the reasons for higher spending by Scottish councils, and to consider the relative efficiency of councils and the quality of service that they deliver.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): This is ridiculous.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman says that it is ridiculous, but it shows the wide gulf—

Mr. Robertson: The Minister has been speaking for 42 minutes.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman says that I have been speaking for 42 minutes, but I have been taking interventions from Opposition Members. He would slag me off if I did not take interventions from hon. Members who want to ask about their councils

Mr. Robertson: It is only a three-hour debate.

Mr. Kynoch: It is a three-and-a-half-hour debate. The hon. Gentleman is trying to divert attention from what I am trying to say.

We challenge the Labour party to say whether, in the unlikely event that it were to form the next Government, it would also proceed with the second-stage study. It seems reluctant to do so. I ask again whether the hon. Member for Hamilton would do it. Perhaps Opposition Members would prefer not to lift the lid on local government spending, for fear of what they might find. Council tax payers will doubtless draw that conclusion.

I repeat that reasoned, realistic, informed debate benefits local government. We have recent examples to prove it. The serious and thoughtful representations from a number of councils led us to review the capping limits set for 15 relatively low-spending councils, which argued that it was unfair that they should be permitted only the same year-on-year increase in capped expenditure as high-spending councils. The councils that argued for an increase in their capping limits accepted that the additional costs would have to fall on their council tax payers. That change in capping limits would push up council tax levels and local authority self-financed expenditure by £10 million.

As we tirelessly try to explain to Opposition Members, that increase in public expenditure can be afforded only by making offsetting reductions in other expenditure programmes. We have explained our intention to reduce the level of local authority capital consent that will be issued for next year, by some £10 million. That will come from a supplementary allocation later in the year.

A further reasoned and realistic proposal put to us concerns the so-called "spend to save" scheme. We accept that some authorities face difficulties in adjusting their existing spending patterns to what can be afforded, while protecting the front-line services to which we all attach priority. At the suggestion of COSLA, we have agreed to grant councils additional flexibility within the total resources available to them, to allow them, if they so wish, to use some of their capital provision to secure savings on their revenue budgets. No new resources are available for that purpose, but it will give councils more room to manoeuvre in setting budgets. Officials are discussing as a matter of urgency the practicalities of that with councils that are interested in the scheme.

These measures genuinely help local government—unlike the constant repetition of tired and implausible claims about cuts and underfunding. The measures recognise the reality of public expenditure—that more for one programme means less for another. Altogether, the settlement for next year is very favourable. I challenge the Labour party—which has ambitions to form the next Government—to say whether it would increase the settlement and, if so, where that additional money would be found. If, as I suspect, Labour Members remain silent on that, I must ask whether—in line with their past practice following such debates—they plan to divide the House on the orders. If so, why? Yet again we shall see the inconsistency in the logic of the Labour party in Scotland. For my part, I commend the two orders and the two reports to the House.

Madam Speaker: I call—*[Interruption.]* I call Mr. George Robertson.

4.26 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): The Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and I were stuck on the 10 o'clock Edinburgh shuttle for some three hours today. Clearly, we have been forgotten down here in the interim.

I start by welcoming the special grant report that has been tabled in relation to Dunblane primary school. I fully support this order and the moneys that have been made available. The order is a reflection of a tragedy that occurred almost a year ago, which united this House. There were unavoidable costs attached, and let us hope that those are never to be incurred again. We fully support and agree with the moneys provided to cover those costs.

I cannot say the same for the rest of the Government's plans for local government. One of the more disappointing aspects of this important debate—in which we are considering local government on the edge of a general election—is that the Secretary of State for Scotland did not open it. His predecessor had the guts to come to these debates most years, and did not put up some clone in his place. This is the key local government debate of the year, and the right hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang)—the Secretary of State's predecessor—did not desert the battlefield when it came to defending the indefensible policy of the Government.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): My hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland is perfectly capable of putting the case for local government. The difference between the situation when my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade was Secretary of State for Scotland and now is that, in his day, the Labour party was arguing for more money, and was not supporting the Government.

Mr. Robertson: I do not think that that is sufficient excuse. The right hon. Gentleman is not capable of defending the Government's indefensible position on local government. People outside the House will reach the right conclusion.

I will state our position on local government and local government expenditure, but it is for the Government, in their dying days, to tell us why they have allowed this situation to develop, and why they promote this settlement. The Minister, whom the Secretary of State seems to trust, has signally failed to do that. Despite taking 47 minutes of a three-and-a-half hour debate, he gave no explanation of why local authorities across Scotland have been put in such a position, or why council tax payers must pay the penalty.

The Secretary of State fiddles, like some tartan Nero, on the eve of a general election, while communities across Scotland suffer the consequences of his settlement. That is another example of the arrogant complacency that has been the hallmark of his period in office, which has meant that he has barely risen a fraction in the opinion polls, despite our momentary drop.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the disappointments of these debates is the way in which he talks down to Conservative Members and uses personal abuse? He should stick to the issues. Is it not a greater disappointment to him that the majority of Scottish Labour Members have not turned up? Perhaps they are all on foreign trips.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman says that it is a pity that we resort to personal abuse; then personally abuses people who are not even here. That is the sort of consistency that we have enjoyed from him during his brief period in the House.

This is an important debate about what the Government propose this year for local government. As local government takes up almost half the Scottish Office budget, it is a subject of more than average relevance to the House and to Scotland.

Not one independent commentator on local government in Scotland agrees with what the Minister told the House. They all agree that council tax bills will go up way above inflation, that compulsory redundancies will be forced on councils, and that there will be real and painful reductions in services across Scotland: all because of the Government's grant settlement for this year. I doubt whether the Minister expects anyone in Scotland to believe his fiddled statistics.

Mr. Kynoch: I challenge the hon. Gentleman again to say how much more he would give if he were in government. How much, and from where?

Mr. Robertson: I will deal with that precisely later. No incoming Government could repair in their first

[Mr. Robertson]

18 months the damage of the economic failure of 18 years of the Conservatives. I make no pretence about it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and I have made it clear that we are not likely to find extra hidden caches of money left behind by the Government when they lose power. We have to accept the spending limits that have been laid down for the current year.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside) *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will wait while I answer the Minister.

We will have to live with the totals, but we will have wholly different priorities. We will put extra money into education in Scotland by abolishing the nursery voucher scheme and providing places for all four-year-olds in Scotland. By abolishing the assisted places scheme and reducing class sizes for the first three years of primary education, we will put extra money into education in Scotland. Through other means, we will find more money for the education system of our country, because that is vital for our future competitiveness. It would be wildly irresponsible to do that when the statistics are not available.

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman criticises the Government on the basis of figures that they provided from the Red Book and other sources. Government is about determining priorities. What are his priorities? Which budgets will he reduce to increase other budgets? He should remember that we have not all been in the House for a short time. Will he say just what he can do? I do not mean palliatives such as the little bits and pieces he mentioned. In real money terms, what changes will he make?

Mr. Robertson: No wonder the hon. Gentleman wants to know—the Conservative Government will not tell the people of Scotland anything about what they would do if they won the next general election. One would think that the election had already been won—that Labour were the Government and the Conservatives were the Opposition. The Conservatives no longer have any responsibility, any ideas or any clue about what they will offer the people of Scotland in future.

Where did the Secretary of State manage to find £500,000 for one opted-out school, which just happened to be in his constituency? He told us last year that they were strapped, that there was no extra money to help local government and no extra money for education or for the health service, yet halfway through the year £500,000 was spirited up.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: If the right hon. Gentleman will sit down and wait for a minute, I shall. One of his great problems is that he seems to be incapable of listening—he always wants to be telling. The Secretary of State might be better off, on the edge of an election, if he was capable of listening to the Scottish people instead of lecturing them. Now let him ask his question.

Mr. Forsyth: I was hoping to answer the question that the hon. Gentleman put to me. He asked where the money for the opted-out schools came from. There is a Budget line for it—it is all published, and the hon. Gentleman can see our priorities. If he wishes to have other priorities, he should say where the money will come from, and stop pretending that the information is not available to him. When he says that he will abolish nursery vouchers, that is extra money for local government—an extra £30 million in year one. Where is the hon. Gentleman going to find that extra money he is promising? If he is not promising extra money, why is he opposing the settlement?

Mr. Robertson: We are opposing the orders tonight so that the Government can go back and look again at their priorities. The Secretary of State says that he found the £500,000 for the one opted-out school in his constituency from a specific Budget line—of course he did not do that. When, in the Scottish Grand Committee, he threw a document across, it was a generalised figure of £24 million for education in Scotland.

The right hon. Gentleman is able to do that, just as the Conservatives during their tenure in the Scottish Office wasted £1 billion on the poll tax. In the straitened circumstances in which they insisted they found themselves, the Government were able to waste—lose in a black hole—£1 billion of taxpayers' money on a failed experiment in local taxation whose residue is felt even today.

The Government have managed to lose or waste billions of pounds on the privatisation of the railways; £30 million was wasted on Health Care International—

Mr. Welsh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: If the hon. Gentleman will let me finishing reciting this catalogue of waste for which the Government are responsible, I shall be happy to listen to how his party will pay for everything on every account.

The Government lost £30 million on an investment in a private hospital at Clydebank.

Mr. Kynoch: Those are last year's figures.

Mr. Robertson: Last year's figures—last year's waste and last year's mistakes. Yes, but they were all found within a Scottish Office budget, and when we come to power, we will scrutinise that budget with great care to see where savings can be made and waste prevented. What about the £1 million that the Government are going to spend on advertising the voucher scheme that almost no one in Scotland actually wants? Where will the money come from to enable them to push that scheme down people's throats on the edge of the election?

Mr. Welsh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Angus, but I stress to the House and to failed Tory Ministers that they were responsible for that waste—they were able to find that money. We will change the

priorities within the Scottish Office budget and within every other budget in the land, and people will notice right away where our priorities are.

Mr. Welsh: I want to ask a specific question. Would the hon. Gentleman wish to continue the policy of the self-financing public sector pay awards?

Mr. Robertson: We intend to finance pay awards next year out of the existing settlement—my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor has made that absolutely clear. The Scottish National party believes that anything may be financed. I wonder what sort of settlement the hon. Gentleman would impose. Clearly, SNP councils have had to live with the existing budgets.

I return to the local government settlement, and to the deceit and the fiction of the Government's case. We are used to the broken promises and lies about taxation from this Government. The fact is that, even according to the Government's figures, permitted expenditure this year will rise by only £75 million, or 1.4 per cent—and that is before new burdens placed on local government by central Government and Parliament are taken into account. We have yet to deal with the deception regarding the cost and the savings of local government reorganisation, and the self-financing awards have yet to take place.

The Government's case is simply not true. As I said, no independent commentators in Scotland or elsewhere will support the Government's contention that more money is being made available in real terms to local government in Scotland. Councils must finance new burdens out of this year's settlement.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman should sit down. We shared a cab today, but that is all that I am willing to share with him at present.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: You have to give way.

Mr. Robertson: We are back to the old "kissing cousins" relationship between the two extremities of Scottish politics. However, the people of Scotland will continue to choose the middle ground. Even in today's poor opinion poll, we are 20 per cent. ahead of the party of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), and 30 per cent. ahead of the Government. That says it all.

New burdens have been imposed on local government. It must finance the installation of seat belts in school transport. The landfill tax from last year's Budget has produced huge burdens for local authorities across Scotland. Increased burdens have arisen from care in the community and support for carers legislation passed in the House. Extra burdens have been imposed by the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Higher contributions are required from local authorities for police and fire employees. Those additional burdens have been imposed upon local government in the past year, and they will not be funded by the Government.

Mr. Kynoch *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: I have given way to the Minister twice. He spoke for 47 minutes in a three-and-a-half-hour debate. Many of my colleagues wish to speak also, so perhaps he should sit back and listen rather than talking all the time.

Mr. Kynoch: Chicken.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Hon. Members will recall that "Erskine May" asks us to conduct debate with moderation and good temper. The debate seems reasonably good-tempered at present: let us keep it that way, and possibly improve it.

Mr. Robertson: I hope that the Minister will take that rebuke on board.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not a rebuke: it is a reminder that is addressed to all hon. Members.

Mr. Robertson: The fact that the Secretary of State did not come to the Dispatch Box today will be noted all over Scotland. The people of Scotland recognise the importance of the local government settlement this year.

On top of the burdens that have been heaped on local government but not financed by central Government, the Government have decided to impose their own priorities on local authorities. Despite the Secretary of State's fine words last year during the Dick Stewart memorial lecture about local government having more power, authority and autonomy, he decided to top-slice the budgets this year and impose his priorities on local government first. Some £103 million has been top-sliced for police, fire services and education.

Mr. Forsyth: Security in schools.

Mr. Robertson: I do not disagree with some of those priorities; I simply point to the contrast between the Secretary of State's claims that local government should have greater autonomy and his decision to top-slice the budgets in advance. He knows that that will mean cuts in other local government budgets. We should recognise that the Secretary of State's fine words about local government autonomy boil down to his making more choices off his own bat in areas where others previously had the right to take decisions, to make mistakes and to stand by them at the ballot box.

Another deceit at the heart of the local government settlement is the pretence that local government reorganisation has brought significant savings. Not one person in Scotland believes that daft claim. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy established a joint committee to examine the cost of reorganisation. They asked the Government whether they would care to be involved, but, significantly, the Government said that they would not co-operate with the study.

That independent study found that the Government have under-estimated the cost of local government reorganisation by some £200 million, resulting in a hole of £50 million in this year's local government settlement. Only a few years ago, the Government set out to gerrymander a wasteful, unnecessary, unresearched and under-prepared reorganisation of local government. It was inevitable that that botched reorganisation would cost

[Mr. Robertson]

money, and they now expect the taxpayer to pick up the tab for that gargantuan and enduring Tory folly. That £50 million hole as a result of local government reorganisation—which the Government pretend is a saving—lies at the root of certain problems facing councils today.

The reorganisation has created particular problems for some councils. Councils such as City of Glasgow, East Dunbartonshire, Dundee, Argyll and Bute and Borders have been left to swing in the wind as Ministers fail to recognise the consequences of reorganisation. In some cases, those consequences have had brutal effects on services—and they will have an even worse effect on council tax payers.

Ministers stand back, as though they had nothing to do with the reorganisation or the disaggregation of staff and budgets, and allow those councils to swing in the wind. It is a total abdication of responsibility by Ministers, who pretend that they had nothing to do with creating the new local government set-up: it is almost as though a pure accident of fate created 29 mainland councils in Scotland. All the consequences are ignored, as the problems pile up—problems that were created simply by the way in which the reorganisation affected local government financing.

We stand for partnership in local government, not provocation. We will replace the destructive confrontational approach of the present Government with a constructive partnership with local government in the public interest. We shall not be easy on councils next year as we try to sort out the debris of the Government's economic stewardship. Eighteen years of damage inflicted on government, particularly local government, cannot be resolved in the first 18 months of a Labour Government, but there is the prospect of a better future for local government.

We will tackle the problem of council tax collection—a legacy of the poll tax—and we will give councils the extra powers they require in order to ensure that the money is collected. We shall ensure that value for money is the criterion, not simply cheapness of product; that is why the crude competitive tendering that the Government have stood for over the years will be swept away and a better, quality-based system put in its place.

We shall set up an independent review into the relationship between central Government and local government in Scotland—a partnership review, which will allow all these things to be examined, and if that means that we are considering the distribution formula or the way in which that formula is organised, I expect that COSLA will want to participate in considering how it can or could be improved.

These are ways in which we shall make progress in our relationship with local government if we are returned at the election in only a few weeks' time.

In the meantime, it is, I fear, an unfortunate fact that the present Secretary of State has a grudge against Scottish local government. He clearly wants revenge, as does the Conservative party, on a local government structure that the Conservatives gerrymandered for their own interests but which did not deliver a single Tory council to them two years ago. That is the only possible explanation for this year's punitive settlement, and for the parade of fraudulent propaganda about extra money for local councils, which every member of the Scottish public knows not to be true.

I believe it was two weeks ago last Saturday that the Secretary of State for Scotland told BBC radio's "Newsround" programme that he wanted to give more power back to local councils, and that he had even prepared a devolution to local government Bill, of which nothing has been heard since. No one believes him on the Bill or on his intentions about devolving more power to local government. He has become the enemy of local democracy, whether at council or Scottish level.

However, the real tragedy, I fear, about this vengeful confrontation is that the victims of the Secretary of State's prejudice will not be the Tory Ministers who will bite the dust in the next few weeks, but the vulnerable people throughout Scotland who depend on local government services—on home helps, care assistants and those who work in local government—and the millions who will pay a hefty price in their council tax bills for the Government's dismal economic failure.

Those people who will suffer, those people in local government who will lose their jobs, and those people who depend on the services of local government, will certainly remember the Government—but they are unlikely ever to forgive them.

4.51 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): After 21 minutes of the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), I must say that I preferred 42 minutes of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch).

We had 21 minutes of cliché, riddled with perorations that kept mounting and falling away, and then it was the usual story—when the hon. Member for Hamilton is asked questions, he is always going to answer them but never does. Whether the subject is local government or the tartan tax or anything else to do with government in Scotland, he sits on fences watching them crumble beneath him, and never answers. He never gives a clear answer; even in the effort that he made in the Sunday newspapers to clear up the tartan tax, he sat on the fence and dodged most of the issues, and he knows it.

The performance of the hon. Member for Hamilton this afternoon was most disappointing. I want an answer from him—if not from him, perhaps from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) later. The hon. Member for Hamilton sweeps his hands around and says, "We shall change the budget," but the only things that he was prepared to say he would change were vouchers and the assisted places scheme. Where will he get the other hundreds of millions that he says will sort out the problems of local government in Scotland?

The hon. Gentleman speaks about partnership and not confrontation. Is he looking forward to meeting the parents of the children who will lose vouchers or assisted places? Is that partnership? It is confrontation of the most evil kind. [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] Parents look after their children's education, and if they have the opportunity of an assisted place or a voucher for nursery education, they will grasp it with both hands, yet the hon. Member for Hamilton says that he will sweep it away, in dictatorial fashion. There will be no chance for parents who want their children to have a better education. He is a pathetic figure, sitting on that Front Bench.

I noted today, when I was sitting listening to 21 minutes of peroration that never reached an end, that it was almost exactly this month 45 years ago that I was elected to a local authority—in a four-cornered fight, in case the hon. Member for Hamilton thinks I got in under the counter.

In many ways, local government has not changed. Throughout my years as a county councillor, we were asking, "Why can't we have more money to improve our services?", but we knew that we had to produce the money by good housekeeping, good husbandry and keeping down expenditure. The challenge was not how to increase local taxation but how to reduce expenditure. That is the challenge for local authorities. They always ask, "How can we spend more?" when the challenge is, "How can we spend less if we are to look after the interests of our many constituents in the local authority?"

I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is doing for the people of Dunblane; it is absolutely right, and I support that move entirely. It reminds me that the Government were so helpful at the time of the major disaster at Lockerbie, when we lost 270 people in one evening.

It is profoundly disappointing that, although COSLA was set up to try to bring the best out of local authorities, it seems only to use its Labour majority to hammer the Government, day in, day out. I should like COSLA to make a much more co-operative effort to find the right formula—the rural authorities are, obviously, highly critical of the formula agreed by COSLA—for the distribution of the block grant.

Labour councillors, independent councillors, Scottish National party and Liberal Democrat councillors and so on are not correct when they say that there are cuts everywhere, because it simply is not true. The statistics show that there are increases of £140 million—2.2 per cent.—and that cannot be converted into cuts, however one wants to jiggle the statistics, including this and excluding that, and then say, "It isn't fair." Ultimately it must be recognised that the Government have provided more money for local authorities, and that there is not a cut in their resources.

I shall mention the Labour party once more. It is not good enough—*[Interruption.]* Good Lord, the hon. Member for Hamilton has gone already. *[Laughter.]* Oh, he is back again. It is not good enough for the hon. Member for Hamilton to sit there, and stand there later, and not tell us how he intends to give more to local authorities, when his Front-Bench spokesman, the shadow Chancellor, says that there is no more for local authorities. That may be why his public opinion poll rating has plummeted today, and perhaps that is why he is so crotchety and unhappy sitting there on the Front Bench: because he knows that, once the poll begins to slide, it is very unlikely to stop.

I shall briefly mention what has been happening in Glasgow. I notice from the report given to us by the chief executive that there were 203 conference attendances by Glasgow councillors, costing in total more than £110,000. We all know that some councillors must attend some conferences. That is the way that government and local government work: I accept that, especially if one is in charge of a major city like Glasgow or Edinburgh, one must fly the flag for Scotland and for those cities. But there is a limit. Most of us would say that the Glasgow figure was in excess of what is required. Aggregate external finance per head for Glasgow is £181—by far the highest figure on the mainland. Glasgow had a case to answer, and it has not communicated it very well so far.

I shall now discuss special responsibility allowances. Of course certain members of every council must have special responsibility allowances. However, when 739 of the 1,235 councillors get special responsibility allowances, one feels that it has gone over the top. Councillors should examine the matter carefully. Certainly, convenors, vice-convenors and chairmen of committees must have such allowances, but that does not mean that 50 or 60 per cent. of the council should have them.

I was grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for seeing representatives of my local authority, Dumfries and Galloway, and I was pleased that under the new arrangements, he was able to increase the capping limit by £784,000 to £159.2 million. That is a welcome increase to the council's resources, although it is recognised that there will be an increase in council tax.

I was pleased to note an increase of £3.2 million, or 2.2 per cent., in aggregate external finance. The AEF per head for that council is £140, which is the seventh highest figure out of the 29 mainland authorities.

I highlight the fact that Dumfries and Galloway council has had an increase in its resources and in its capping limit. Councillors should not go around crying wolf and complaining that they have had to make dramatic cuts because of the Government's limit on resources. The council has set its own budget £10 million above the figure that the Government consider appropriate expenditure. That budget is being cut, not the money that the Government have given the council for distribution. I hope that councillors will stop giving the impression that the Government have dramatically cut council resources.

Councillors must not mislead their council tax payers. Last year, I thought that, in the budget strategy statement that went out with council tax demands, the council had been a little economical with the truth about where the cuts had come from. The statement did not highlight the fact that it was the council's budget, not the Government's, that had been reduced.

I have received a stream of letters from my constituents, especially on education. Perhaps they did not realise that, in its block grant, the authority has great flexibility, and can decide spending priorities. I am worried that music education, school buildings and library services all seem to be suffering, although the Government have encouraged greater spending on education, just as they have ring-fenced spending on the fire service and the police. In the block grant, I hope that there will be provision to ensure that elderly folk are properly looked after, with regard to transport and retirement homes.

It is for councillors to set priorities within the block grant, which, I emphasise again, has been increased this year. They may have a point when they say that the COSLA formula may not be in favour of rural areas. That should be re-examined. I hope that there will be no redundancies. The majority of council staff can be retained within the present budget, although I know that the council is making every effort to reduce expenditure.

[Sir Hector Monro]

I put some blame on COSLA for the level of payment to officials. In my authority, with 150,000 inhabitants—150,000 voters would be easier, in terms of statistics—no fewer than 48 officials earned more than £40,000. I know that that has been adjusted, as was clearly necessary.

In view of the budget that has been set, an increase in council tax is inevitable. I shall be disappointed if it cannot be held at 11 to 12 per cent. That is far above inflation, but it is the best that can be hoped for. I hear rumours of a 15 to 20 per cent. increase, which would be unacceptable. I hope that the council will take the matter seriously, especially as the amount of uncollected tax stands at £8.1 million.

I put on record the impact that Labour might have on business rates, which are extremely important in rural areas such as mine. The Secretary of State has acted to assist business rates over recent years.

I am glad that we have been able to keep capital expenditure at a good level, so that contractors and other local business men will benefit from it.

My hon. Friend the Minister repeatedly asked Labour Front-Bench Members how they would change the finances of local government without increasing taxation. The tartan tax, which would not go very far, would be singularly unfair to the Scots people. How will it be done? The Scots people are entitled to know before the election what form of taxation or adjustments to the budget will be introduced by Labour to finance local government in Scotland.

The Opposition are highly critical of the present system, but they have not given one iota of consideration to what they will do, other than scrapping vouchers and dealing with assisted places. Those constitute a drop in the ocean, out of the huge budget of the Scottish Office. The Opposition are failing the country by not revealing what they will do, so that everyone can gang up and vote against them when it becomes clear that their plans are unacceptable.

5.5 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): The director of finance of Glasgow district council told the Minister on Friday that it was all very well for the Minister to say that Glasgow had more money, but in respect of police and fire services and the nursery voucher scheme, more burdens have been put on the city of Glasgow. In real terms the capping limit is down by £2,683,000, which means that Glasgow is getting less than it got before. The Minister should take that on board.

I heard the Minister comment on Friday about trips that councillors made abroad, and the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) also referred to the matter, but not for any vexatious reason. The Minister is the Minister for Local Government, and at any time he can call Glasgow or any other local authority to account. He started making public utterances only when the matter was raised in the press.

I am not here to question the wisdom of any of those trips, but I want to put it on record that every councillor in Glasgow, especially those who met the Minister on Friday, has behaved honestly and worked according to the legislation. No one should imply otherwise.

Mr. Kynoch: That is not what I was suggesting. I suggested that it was a strange prioritisation of expenditure for councillors to go on those trips at a time when they were trying to make massive cuts, as they call them, and reduce jobs. Prioritisation is the responsibility of government, whether national or local.

Mr. Martin: I was worried that in his public utterances the Minister had implied that the councillors had acted dishonestly. If he thought so, he as the Minister responsible should be able to call anyone in local government to account.

For the first time in my parliamentary life, and for the first time, I think, in the lifetime of Parliament, following the activities of certain hon. Members, we have been required to employ the services of Sir Gordon Downey, because hon. Members have not conducted themselves as the House would expect. If anyone wants to hurl stones, he should look at our own problems. I speak as a Member of Parliament who is not one for travelling abroad. I am deeply ashamed of the fact that we had to bring an outsider into the House to regulate our affairs. Perhaps we should examine our own priorities.

The £9 million deficit of which the Minister spoke was left by Strathclyde regional council, an organisation that he disbanded—against the advice of the vast majority of hon. Members who lived in the region or represented seats there. Glasgow cannot go to Strathclyde council and say, "We want our £9 million", because the Minister has disbanded it. The Glaswegians would have had £9 million in the current year had it not been for the Minister's decision.

The Minister went way over the top when he said that the councillors were only scaremongering. Ninety-day notices have been sent to every employee in the city of Glasgow. Is that scaremongering? Because the councillors must act in accordance with legislation laid down by the House, people are in danger of losing their jobs. That is far from scaremongering. If it is scaremongering, can I tell the home helps in Dennistoun, Possil Park and Springburn that they will not lose their jobs? Two thousand decent men and women may have to go down the road unless we can persuade the Government that more funds should be put into our city.

I hope that the Minister will stop attacking local government, which is in the front line of our caring services. Without home helps, many old people would go from one day to the next with no human contact—without hearing words of comfort from another human being. Our old folks' homes in Glasgow are second to none. They were not built last week or the week before; they were built up through the dedication of men and women in local government. Those people gave their all to local authorities: they worked during the day, and went to council and tenants' association meetings at night. They got rid of places such as Forest Hall, which used to be a workhouse.

When I was a young councillor in Springburn, that old workhouse—set up under the old poor law—was still there. That it is no longer there is to the credit of Pat Trainer, a union official and councillor who was one of my colleagues. Some of my hon. Friends know him. His life's dream was to see Forest Hall destroyed, and replaced by three old folks' homes. How can the staff in those homes, which are second to none, continue their dedicated work if they risk losing their jobs? The great law-and-order party tells us that it will give more money

to the police. What is the point of lifting young delinquents off the streets if we are closing youth and community centres? That is what we are doing now, because of the Government's decisions. We are giving more power to the police. When we were youngsters, the police always told us that the best thing that we could do was keep off the streets and not get into trouble. How can policemen say that in this day and age?

We have lunch clubs enabling elderly people to get out for half a day, giving their carers some respite and time to draw breath. Those clubs are now going to close.

The Minister knows the city of Glasgow. Indeed, he was there last Friday. He will be aware that there are no green fields in the city; it is surrounded by other local authorities. Some of those authorities are, quite unfairly, feeding off Glasgow's services, and are not prepared to put anything into our city. The Minister will say, "But I meet members of COSLA, and they reach a collective decision. They all feel that the formula is fair." Every time I meet councillors from outside Glasgow, they say that Glasgow is a special case because thousands of people go into the city to work and then leave at night—including a good many of the constituents of the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart). I hope that he will fight the cuts, because some of the 2,000 people who are going to lose their jobs come from his constituency.

Every councillor whom I have met has said that Glasgow is a special case, but none of them is prepared to say the same when they get together in organisations such as COSLA. Anyone who knows Glasgow and its problems must accept that it needs extra finance. The Minister is doing a disservice to men and women who have dedicated their lives to local government, and I hope that he will reconsider.

5.15 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) spoke mainly about the city of Glasgow. As the House knows, he speaks from a base of enormous personal experience and knowledge of local government in that city. I shall return to one or two of his points, but first let me tell him that, if the Scottish Labour movement regards Glasgow as a special case, the solution is in its own hands. It runs COSLA; it has the dominant majority on the distribution committee. No formula to change the figures has emerged from that dominant body, however.

The first Opposition speaker today was the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who has slipped out of the Chamber. I make no complaint about that. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) said, the hon. Gentleman seemed a bit ratty today: he was not at all his normal sunny self. I do not know whether that was due to the company that he kept this morning or to the opinion polls—

Mr. Gallie: He is always like that.

Mr. Stewart: No, he is not. My hon. Friend is unnecessarily critical of the hon. Gentleman.

I think that the hon. Gentleman was ratty because he was rattled by my hon. Friend the Minister. My hon. Friend asked him about the silence of the Opposition Front Bench, and he remained silent on that key point throughout his speech. Surely it is not unreasonable for those in local government in Scotland, and Conservative Members of Parliament, to say to the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, "We are within a few weeks of a general election. You hope to become Secretary of State. Will you tell us—not every detail but in broad terms—what you would actually do?" The answer is fairly clear—for there was an answer: there is going to be an independent review of relationships between central Government and local government in Scotland. "Vote new Labour. Paradise regained. Another quango." That is a message to have them rolling with enthusiasm to the polling stations on election day: a new vision for Scottish local government.

It was unworthy of the hon. Member for Hamilton to suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that there was something wrong in his opening the debate, rather than the Secretary of State. I recall opening such debates myself, when Opposition Members consistently made speeches, year after year, in which they said that the end of the world was nigh. The same message—"This local government settlement is the worst thing that has happened to the people of Scotland since Flodden"—came from the Opposition Benches year after year after year. Every year until now, Opposition Members have said, "It will be all right. Wait for a Labour Government." The message is different this year, however. It is, "If you get a Labour Government, we will not change the figures at all." In fact, as the hon. Member for Hamilton did not admit, the figures in the second and subsequent years would be worse, because the Opposition plan a Scottish parliament with no net increase in public expenditure. Where would the money come from? It would have to come from local government.

Mrs. Fyfe: Has the hon. Gentleman ever made an estimate of the benefit that the residents of Eastwood gain from Glasgow services while contributing not a penny to them?

Mr. Stewart: The residents of Bearsden and Strathkelvin will be very interested to hear that attack from the Labour Benches, which was unanimously supported by Scottish Labour Members who are present. The Labour party believes that the residents of Bearsden and Strathkelvin are all parasites. Let that message go throughout Bearsden and Strathkelvin. Of course they are not parasites, and nor are the residents of Eastwood.

If the good people who run the city of Glasgow believe that people are getting services for free, I would not stop them charging for their libraries, galleries or whatever. I would be in favour of charging. Let them stop complaining, because they have £21 million of mismatch money. That is other people's money. It rightfully belongs to the people of Strathkelvin, Bearsden, East Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire and elsewhere.

Mr. Gallie: Does not at least 65 per cent. of local government funding come from general taxation? Therefore, do not the residents of Eastwood probably contribute more than their fair share?

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is being modest in that figure. The real figure is some 85 per cent. It would not

[Mr. Stewart]

be difficult for me to make a case saying that East Renfrewshire is grossly over-subsidising Glasgow. It is a fact—

Mrs. Fyfe: Give us the figures.

Mr. Stewart: I will give the hon. Lady an important figure if she will just pin her ears back. Aggregate external finance per capita for the city of Glasgow is 80 per cent. above the English average—that is money from the general taxpayer—so let us have none of this nonsense about Glasgow not getting a fair deal from the Government.

The hon. Member for Hamilton implied fairly clearly that Labour would not change the overall settlement, except for assisted places and nursery vouchers. As I have said before, the House is indebted to the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) for pointing out in detail what Labour's assisted places pledge means in terms of the figures. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries rightly and properly talked about the argument. There would be one extra teacher per constituency—a wonderful pledge. Labour would also abolish nursery vouchers. I know something about nursery vouchers, because East Renfrewshire was one of the pilot authorities for the scheme in Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), the Minister with responsibility for education in Scotland, should go into the "Guinness Book of Records", because he introduced the nursery voucher scheme—a major Government initiative—and nobody is complaining about it. Not a single resident of Eastwood is complaining about the scheme. It has been an enormous success in a Labour-held authority, but it would be swept away by the ideology of the Labour party.

I hope that my hon. Friend on the Front Bench will confirm my understanding of the figures for East Renfrewshire council. I understand that the permitted increase in expenditure is some 7.63 per cent. and that the grant-aided expenditure is up 6.79 per cent., before allowing for the mismatch adjustment. Those figures seem perfectly reasonable, if not generous.

I shall say a word on the trips-for-votes controversy, as hon. Members from Glasgow seem a bit edgy about it. Nobody is suggesting—or has suggested—that Glasgow councillors have done anything financially improper. On the point about roses, it is reasonable, however, to ask, why councillors did not just get into one of their 27 or 28 limousines and go across the boundary into Eastwood, where, of course, we have blue roses. Looking down the list, I can see that they went all over Europe to look at roses—Rome, Dublin, Belfast, Paris, Geneva. I do not complain about that, but they cannot say, "We have the worst financial crisis in history," and, "We are wholly underfunded by the Government," and at the same time go around the continent looking at roses. That results in a certain lack of credibility about their initial posture. That is a valid criticism. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, it is a question of priorities.

Mention was made of the shadow Chancellor and what he said. Paradoxically, he has done Scottish local government a favour, because too many people are misled by Opposition Members, who say, "It's all right folks. Wait for a Labour Government. There will be a new nirvana. Money will be pouring from everywhere for you. All will be resolved." That will not happen. If that means that there is greater concentration on financial reality, it will be in the interest of Scottish local government. It will be in the interest of those who work in Scottish local government, those who pay for Scottish local government and those who receive the services of Scottish local government.

5.26 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): This is a terrible debate. The temptation to blame others for what is going on is strong. Indeed, we are all guilty of it. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) rightly said, people's jobs are at risk, schools and residential homes are being closed and pools are being shut. I do not know who is to blame, but anybody involved in what is going on would be disappointed if they listened to the debate.

All hon. Members know that the Government set total spending limits and grants. They also set overall and local expenditure. If the Red Book three-year public expenditure survey allocations are adhered to—whether by a Labour or Conservative Government—local government will have to change fundamentally.

If Governments insist that local government save money year on year—we are in the fourth year of funding salary increases from efficiency savings—it will have to consider displenishing in its entirety all community care provision in residential care homes. It will have to consider moving out of local education authority service provision and leave schools to manage themselves. Local authorities will have to consider full-scale privatisations to such an extent that they will become nothing more than contract-fixing bodies.

It is possible that that could happen and the world would not end, but if my constituents were given a choice between what I have described and finding the appropriate finance I am pretty confident—I can speak only for my area, as I do not know about Glasgow—that they would be willing to spend more to get properly funded services. I stood in the sleeting rain on Saturday morning in Jedburgh square, where 1,500 people were shivering in the rain. They were incensed that, on Thursday, the local authority will probably shut their swimming pool. Young people will not have a pool in which to swim, and worse still, doctors will not be able to recommend therapeutic services for elderly people who now receive new treatments in fitness centres instead of taking pills. Youngsters who used to go to the pool on a Friday night will be thrown out on the streets. People are incensed that, for want of £100,000, that facility is to close.

Jedburgh has a sizeable community: it is one of the largest towns in my constituency. The people of Jedburgh cannot just get on a bus and travel to another pool. Even if there were a bus, they would have to travel miles to get to a pool and back, and would take two days to do so.

Local government finance is supposed to enable local authorities to provide a generality of services that are standardised throughout the country. Small authorities may have special circumstances and special problems, because they start with low baseline budgets and cannot find the efficiency savings that the Government require them to make. It may not be the end of the world, but this

year, for the first time, Scottish Borders council will close pools, rural schools—not for educational but for financial reasons—and residential homes. That will not only hurt those who will lose their jobs or access to the services, but cost more in council tax.

People in my part of the world are bamboozled. They do not know how this has come about and whom to blame. The system is opaque, defying attempts to work out whether the local council is doing the right thing. All people know is that they are suffering: their kids are suffering, and their old folk are suffering. On Thursday, decisions will be handed down by the local authority which will cut the fabric of society to the bone, and people will resent that.

The general election is approaching, and I am quite open about the fact that I believe that local government is underfunded by about £150 million for the coming year. My party has said that extra money should be raised, especially for education. When the general election comes and I am going about my business as a candidate in Roxburgh and Berwickshire, I will proudly get on to soap boxes and ask people to pay for education. People at demonstrations that I have attended—I shall be taking part in more of them at the weekend—will cheer me to the echo.

That is my assessment of the political situation. No one is asking for profligacy or waste, and no one is defending what is going on in Glasgow—I do not know anything about people taking trips, incidentally. All I know is that, with a budget of £100 million, my local authority has been put into an impossible straitjacket from which there is no escape, and people in south-east Scotland are hurting.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman referred to an extra £150 million for local authorities, which is more than 1p in the pound on income tax in Scotland. He has also said that the Liberal Democrats would raise 1p in the pound specifically for education. Does that mean that they want to raise income tax by 2p in the pound? Education is only part of local authority expenditure. Higher education must be paid for as well, and I presume that some of that 1p for education would be spent on higher education.

Mr. Kirkwood: The Government have charged us to say where the money will come from, and I am trying to quantify what is required to achieve a sensible settlement for local government next year. Given the figures available to me, my assessment is that £100 million or £150 million is required to provide services of the same high quality as in the past.

My party voted against the tax cuts, without which £2 billion more would now be available. If the Scottish share of that were put into the local government budget, it would provide a 3 per cent. increase, which would amount to between £150 million and £180 million. I would have to persuade the public that that is necessary if they want the services. If they want to have lower taxes and to pay for taxis to take them 40 miles to a swimming pool because the pool in Jedburgh is likely to be closed on Thursday, that is up to them. As a Liberal Democrat and someone who is trying to make sense of the local government settlement, I think that not enough money has been provided.

Education is a priority for Liberal Democrats—I suppose that it is a priority for everyone. We cannot duck the fact that we have had a good education system in Scotland, because we have invested more in it, and I want that to continue.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman is making a thoughtful speech. He suggested that his party would provide extra funding. Has he studied the Coopers and Lybrand and Peida report, which shows that local government in Scotland is well funded across the board? We should seek improvement and value for money, not throw more money into local government.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am as keen as anyone to obtain value for money and efficiency savings. I look forward with enthusiasm to engaging in the argument on the Peida report. I can give the Minister two examples off the top of my head. The local authority in Northumberland may receive less per head than the Scottish Borders council, but many of the development workers with the local development commission are not taken into account. It has park rangers coming out of its ears, and they are not taken into account in the local government settlement for Northumberland. So long as the Peida report covers the professionals who deliver the services and obtains a true, costed comparison, I will happily meet the Minister any place, any time, to discuss the nitty-gritty.

Of course, I want efficiency savings: we must ensure that we get value for money. But people would be more enamoured of what we are doing if we provided the proper resources. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) referred to the new responsibilities that Parliament has given local authorities. Professionals north of the border estimate that the financial burden for community care in the next financial year will be £123 million. I accept that the Government have made allowances for that in the settlement, but the Scottish Office provision is £55 million, which is nowhere near £123 million. Those professionals are not irresponsible party politicians: they are trying to make proper provision under the legislation that the House passed. We give them half the money required to do that—Parliament must stop doing that.

I sponsored the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995, which was introduced by a Labour Member. Professionals estimate that it will cost £50 million next year. What have the Government allowed? Zilch, zero, nothing. It is unconscionable to put layer upon layer of responsibilities on the shoulders of local authorities and expect them to provide services out of fresh air. The contention that local authorities in Scotland have saved up to £60 million is merely accounting acrobatics: the figure is nothing like that, and everybody knows it.

The settlement is one of the worst that I have known since I was elected to the House in 1983. I am faced with difficult meetings. I have to respond to a petition containing 3,000 names that were collected in 10 days in Duns, which will lose its educational centre. We are losing swimming pools and sports centres, which keep the kids off the streets. The meeting about the Jedburgh pool was the most difficult hour and a half that I have spent: we all got soaking wet, but we were proud to do so if it made any difference and made the Government think again about the closure.

[Mr. Kirkwood]

The Burnfoot project has been in existence for 17 years and has a proven track record. The community is proud of that facility for rehabilitating difficult children: it has been used as a model in other parts of the region. Why is it to be closed? Because the local authority has new responsibilities under the Children Act 1989, for God's sake. That Act is supposed to support kids such as those who will be thrown out the door of the Burnfoot project. It is the economics of the madhouse. In addition, Foulden school is, relatively speaking, a brand new building; its doors are going to be shut and the windows boarded up for financial reasons. That will take the heart out of the local village community. The building will be left to moulder and fall to bits, and loan charges will continue to be paid. How does that make sense? How is that to be explained to people whose kids—primary school children—are going to have to get on a bus and go 15 to 20 miles to and from school?

Those decisions are not being taken lightly by Scottish Borders councillors. They are being made because they have absolutely no alternative. They have a budget of £100 million. There is no fat left. They have no flexibility. Half the budget is for education. They are having to make swingeing cuts in services, to reduce jobs and to lower investment, and they will end up with higher council taxes.

This system of local government finance, of raising only £15 out of every £100 yet being accountable for all expenditure, is no use, has had its day and should be swept away. We need not just reviews of the relationship between local and central Government, although that would help, but a root-and-branch reform so that local councillors can truly represent the interests of their council tax payers and be held to account at the ballot box.

My party has suggested proportional representation, which will make it much more difficult for councillors to hide behind rotten boroughs, and regular elections year after year. If we started thinking in those terms, we could remove the caps and leave local council tax payers to hold the council to account if it is being profligate.

5.41 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): That was an interesting speech. Some important aspects of local government were covered. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) may find that some Conservative Members think that councillors and local government should be held more to account locally, and that the best way to do that is through financial accountability. I do not disagree with that. One of the advantages of the pressures that exist at present is that we may at long last take an in-depth and serious look at how local government is structured, funded and held to account.

People can always, as they do, blame central Government because the bulk of the money—85 per cent.—comes from central taxation. There may be merit in removing revenue raising completely from central Government and letting local government raise it all locally. We might then find that Glasgow and elsewhere would take an entirely different view of how the 85 per cent. funding is distributed.

The plain truth is that, with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities formula, pain is being felt in all sorts of different ways. For example, no real account is taken of the substantial increase in population in my constituency. People want to live in my part of the world, which is not surprising. They want to leave the big cities and to move into country areas, where the quality of life is good. As long as we can contain the numbers, education and all the other facilities will remain at a very high standard, but we may reach a point, and we are getting close to it, where the numbers will make it much more difficult to maintain the quality of services, particularly in education, that we have enjoyed in my constituency.

I say to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) that the comments about people travelling related to doing so at public expense. If people have travelled from this place—the hon. Gentleman drew attention to that—it is important to distinguish between that which is public expenditure and that which is not. I trust that his comments were not directed at the Sir Gordon Downey aspect and at the Select Committees.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I never mentioned the Select Committees.

Mr. Walker: That is what I am saying. I trust that the hon. Gentleman was not talking about Select Committees. He should read his speeches afterwards. He brought together two different activities in a way that devalued the standing of the House—that is how I understood him. If he disagrees, that is fine, but it is not the first time that he has lumped things together to make a point. He does not always understand that people outside do not have the knowledge to break down the differences, as we do in this place, and that can do terrible damage. If he is really concerned about the reputation of this place, as he claims, he should think carefully about the way he lumps things together—that is the only point I am making.

Mr. Martin: I think I have hit a nerve.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman knows my views about seated interventions.

Mr. Walker: If the hon. Gentleman ever wants to make any comments or observations about me, just try it—that is my advice for him. I make many overseas visits that I pay for. I have no qualms about that. What is more important, I take my family with me—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I trust that the House will remember my earlier guidance. Perhaps we could now return to the subject in hand.

Mr. Walker: Certainly, Madam Deputy Speaker. Innuendoes are made about the values and qualities of this place. The hon. Gentleman likes to give the impression that he is the only one who cares. I suggest that the vast majority of Members care, so he should be careful when he makes sweeping assertions.

I should like to know from Labour Front Benchers where the money will come from for the Scottish Parliament. I understood the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) to say that no more money will be available for local government, because this is the settlement that Labour will inherit, so where will the money come from? He could not tell us what the priorities were going to be either. The speech by the hon. Member

for Roxburgh and Berwickshire was important because it drew attention to the fact that people ought to know what the priorities are, which I agree with, and what they are voting for, which I also agree with.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): The hon. Gentleman will realise that we have had 18 years of Tory government and that, in my area of Renfrewshire, the Tories have been wiped out. There are only two left on the council, which the Tories used to control. They have been wiped out because of the bad Tory policies implemented by the Government. The people there want decent education, decent home help services and decent transport. That has all come under terrible attack by the Tories in the House.

Mr. Walker: I have news for the hon. Gentleman: I am a democrat. I fully accept the wishes of the people as expressed at the ballot box. If anything I say or do gives offence, I pay for it and it is proper that I should. It is worth remembering that many Scots are what I call thrawn. They might not find any future Labour Government to their liking and the vote for the other parties in Scotland might suddenly and dramatically increase. That was the experience in the 1960s and 1970s.

The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) rightly says that the Conservative party has been in government for 18 years. We are held accountable, as we should be. At the general election, we will face the electorate on the basis of having been in office for 18 years. I have watched the smiles on the faces of Opposition Members at previous general elections. At almost every election since 1979, they have assumed that somehow the Labour party would make a dramatic recovery. When it did not materialise, I had to look at the same faces again after the election and they got longer, gloomier and glummer.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Those are very interesting reflections, but I am not too sure how they relate to the business in hand.

Mr. Walker: They relate to the debate in that it concerns 18 years of local government expenditure in Scotland. This evening we are debating the current settlement. When one compares local government expenditure, supported centrally and raised locally in Scotland, with that in the rest of the United Kingdom, particularly England, it is obvious that other areas are quite capable of providing services. I agree with the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire that we have to examine all the figures and compare like with like rather than extrapolating from a selected few, but it is clear that the problems do not stem from a lack of money, as substantial sums are being spent.

Perhaps local authorities should consider becoming enablers rather than providers. Some may say that that would lead to job losses, but it would be a diversion of jobs from one sector to another. If Marks and Spencer expanded a store and employed more people, but Woolworths closed part of a store and employed fewer people, there would be a transfer of employment between companies that provided the same service.

The same is true of local government. The inquiry into care in the community in Tayside supports the principle that I hope the House will accept—that, if possible, the same quality of service should be maintained. Tayside achieved a saving of £200 per head per week. If the same saving were made in other sectors, many more people would gain. What matters is the advantage to those who require the service. After all, we are all in the business of providing services for individuals who need them. That applies equally to Marks and Spencer, local government or anyone else. The individuals who require the service are often forgotten.

I am particularly concerned that the increase in population in my constituency has stretched the education budget and that cuts in languages and music lessons are proposed. Naturally that is a cause of local concern, as people want the teaching of those subjects to be maintained.

I should like Ministers to say that COSLA's formula is not sacrosanct and that there are ways of reviewing and revising it. Population increases in large rural areas such as my constituency should lead to a review of the 85 per cent. of the settlement that comes from central Government.

This year, for the first time in years, local government will have to stand up and be counted. Local authorities will have to tell the people of Scotland why they cannot maintain service provision although their budgets have increased in real terms. The answer is that certain assumptions and projections were made about the changeover, many of which have now proved to be flawed and to require attention. With that in mind, we have to accept that there will be increases in council tax, but the money should be directed at the services that most concern local people, such as education.

I have a question for my hon. Friend the Minister. As the Government have allocated a certain sum to police budgets, what happens if the local authority joint police boards decide not to spend it all? The police would not get the advantage of the increased funding which the Government want to provide and the public welcome, so what would happen to the money?

Mr. Kynoch: To save time later, let me answer my hon. Friend. As the police receive a specific grant that is paid against claims from local authorities, if a local authority does not spend the grant, it loses the benefit.

Mr. Walker: I expected that answer, for which I thank my hon. Friend. If the police grant is not demanded or taken up, the police and the local community lose out and the council gains nothing. We should press councils to make the police a priority. People in North Tayside will want to question the two local councils about the attitude that they have adopted.

Opposition Members seem to be looking forward with relish to the general election. They should never count their chickens until they are hatched.

5.54 pm

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): I am also disappointed by the debate. It is a bit like a poor-oot at a wedding—money which is flung out of the car when the bride leaves. It is a poor-oot in Edinburgh. There is a scramble for the money and if anyone does not grab enough, it is hard luck.

We are talking about people's jobs. Care in the community has become a joke. It has been foisted on to local authorities without the appropriate financial backing. At the end of the day the most vulnerable people suffer: the young, the old and disabled people.

[Mr. Eric Clarke]

A great deal of anger is directed at councillors in Midlothian. I was a councillor in Midlothian for 16 years and I agree with the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro). In the days of county councils, councillors stood by the rate. They were elected or not by the rate. We provided facilities within a sensible budget. We did not have central Government dictating to us. I agree that there should be more accountability. When we have a Parliament in Edinburgh we shall work out a more democratic formula for local government.

There has to be proper reform, not the botched up reforms that we have had in the past that killed off and replaced regional authorities. That is the problem in Midlothian. The Minister agreed to meet a delegation from Midlothian and welcomed us in a formal and reasonable way. I cannot criticise him for that, but the result was a different story.

Midlothian made a case for more money, but was told that the formula was worked out along hard lines. We told the Minister that the formula that led to the mismatch and other problems was calculated on an unacceptable basis and he agreed, but when the case reached COSLA's steering committee, Midlothian lost out. The steering committee voted almost unanimously for the formula to continue although we had proved that Midlothian would lose out not just this year, but next year.

What does it mean? I shall read out two questions from Midlothian to the Minister:

"Is the Minister aware that his settlement means a year on year reduction of £3 Million in the grant paid to Midlothian and that this factor alone means a £115 or 16 per cent. increase in Midlothian's council tax?

The formula based assessments have proven to be invalid in that three secondary indicators which remove £2.3 million of grant from Midlothian have failed the statistical test for the second successive year. Is the Minister suggesting that Midlothian Council should cut services to the residents of Midlothian to match up to the indicators which have been proven to be invalid and should have been dropped?"

Midlothian and other authorities have statutory duties. They cannot walk away from them, so what should they do? They are currently giving notice to all their employees.

Like the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), I get rather angry with people who personalise their politics. I do not personalise mine. I do not make personal attacks; I try to be nice. There comes a time, however, when people have to be told the facts of life.

I get angry when people try to discredit Labour and to say that Labour-controlled local authorities are mismanaged, spendthrift, globe-trotting and all the rest of it—because it is just not true. One cannot argue—*[Interruption.]* I am talking about the people whom I represent in Midlothian, and I defy the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland to say otherwise. I am talking about Midlothian, and I do not accept that, in one way or another, it is being mismanaged.

Council administrators and employees are very angry. The faulty formula by which councils are being deprived of money is a return to the poor-oot, and that is not good enough. Councils must ultimately face up to the realities. They are soul-searching and tearing out their hearts to try to make ends meet, and they are doing the best that they possibly can.

Councils will have to decide at the end of this week what they can do with the moneys that they have. However, the problem boils down to the fact that they are being shortchanged by the Government. One can say what one likes, but, like everyone else, I know when I am being shortchanged. One can build up the matter, wrap it up in flannel and flowers or describe it in any way one likes, but, ultimately, the people of Midlothian know who are working against them—the Government, who are shortchanging us all. I am arguing the case for Midlothian, but I am sure that, if they have an opportunity in this debate, many other hon. Members will say the same.

I should tell the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) that it is totally unfair to compare his area with ours. I sympathise with those in the big urban areas. Does he know that the population of Wester Hailes, in Edinburgh, is the same as Perth's? Do they have Perth's facilities or amenities?

Mr. Bill Walker: I do not represent Perth.

Mr. Clarke: I am giving you an example. I am not saying that you represent Perth; I know who represents Perth—the lovely lady up there.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman always to address the Chair?

Mr. Clarke: I am very sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker.

One cannot compare Perth with Wester Hailes, or the big urban areas in Glasgow with some of Scotland's lovely rural cities; and it would be unfair to try to do so. Those cities have natural amenities and resources, whereas urban areas—massive areas of concrete jungle—have very little or nothing at all.

Mr. Walker: I trust that the hon. Gentleman would accept that the cost of providing education in rural areas can be much more expensive because of the distances involved and the problems faced. That is one aspect of the matter. As education is a very large part of local government expenditure—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The Minister does not accept that.

Mr. Walker: Does the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) accept that—when one compares what one gets for every pound spent—it is not unreasonable to say that one must take a population increase into account?

Mr. Clarke: All I am saying is that like-for-like comparisons are very difficult when the circumstances are absolutely different.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) has just given a splendid example of why invidious comparisons between England and Scotland are absolutely inappropriate?

Mr. Clarke: I totally agree. Because of Scotland's sparsely populated areas, with their massive deficits for road maintenance and many other services, it cannot be compared with England.

It is unfair to write off urban areas and merely to say that they are different from the constituency of the hon. Member for North Tayside. Those areas are different, and they have different problems. All I can tell him is that we should be compassionate to one another. It is not a matter of me taking anything away from other areas. In certain circumstances, areas should be given grants and rights. On that basis, I support the city of Glasgow.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Mr. Clarke: I have already given way three times, and I know that other hon. Members would like to speak; I am sorry.

If this debate does nothing else, I hope that it will ensure that those listening to it—not only to my speech, but to those of other hon. Members—understand the reality that we are attempting to describe, so that they can see beyond the smokescreen of allegations about inefficiency and globe-trotting, which, intolerably, is being used to shortchange us all.

People are lying awake at night with worry because of the cuts imposed by the Government on local government—because they do not have a job, because their mothers, fathers or other loved ones will not receive proper medical treatment and because their children will not be educated properly.

6.4 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): The hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) speaks as a member of the shadow Front-Bench team and as a Labour Whip, and he has just challenged the entire thrust of Labour's position on local government expenditure. Labour has said, "Not 1p more"; but he says, "The Government are shortchanging Midlothian." I can tell him that the Opposition will shortchange Midlothian in exactly the same way, because they are not offering any more cash.

The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) intervened on the hon. Member for Midlothian, highlighting the reference by my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) as to why Scotland receives additional expenditure, and she was quite right. The expenditure differential has been expressed in the Barnet formula. The Government have honoured the formula for many years, and they will continue to do so. By emphasising the problems of rural areas, however, she has not examined the situation in cities and in Scotland's central belt.

One question that must be asked is why Glasgow receives 80 per cent. more aggregate external finance than English cities? Why is there a 42 per cent. greater increase in AEF across Scotland than in similar towns and villages in England? It is a major problem, and it must be dealt with. I suggest that Opposition Members take on board the need to examine how money is being spent in local authorities, and to determine true value for money.

In his pathetic speech, the main criticism made by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) was that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland did not open this debate. I should tell Opposition Members that the leader of the Scottish Liberals has not spoken in this debate—nor, I suspect, will the leader of the Scottish National party. Perhaps the difference between hon. Members in the minor Opposition parties and Labour Members is that they have more faith in their junior shadow spokesmen. Obviously the hon. Member for Hamilton does not have such faith. Perhaps that is why the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) is sitting on the Back Benches. I remind the House of the time when he was relegated there. The hon. Member for Hamilton did not even keep him in the picture of Front-Bench thinking. All hon. Members should reflect on that.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) spoke about local authorities and about the belief—particularly in Labour-controlled authorities—that the value of controlling one lies in how much one can spend. I can provide an example of that sentiment from my own days on Cunninghame district council. When I challenged Councillor Jim Clements—whose family was steeped in local government—on why he never became involved with community councils, he said:

"They are worthless. They have no money to spend. I only want to be involved when we have money to spread out and provide services across the community."

He never thought for one moment about how that money was earned. That is the difference between Opposition and Conservative Members.

I know that Opposition Members have recently challenged the Government on the health service. We have been told that efficiencies are necessary. I have a letter from the North Ayrshire and Arran trust which challenges the beliefs of Opposition Members. It states:

"The numbers of nurses and midwives have increased by 4.6 per cent. since April 1993".

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman goes cantering down that particular road, I remind him that we are debating local government finance.

Mr. Gallie: I fully accept that point, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was attempting to illustrate how wrong Opposition Members are on those issues. They believe that attempts have not been made in other areas, such as the health service, to rationalise and to produce results and wise expenditure levels. Such results have been achieved in the health service, unlike in local government. It is time for local authorities to reanalyse their position. I recognise that I shall have to sit down in the not too distant future to allow other hon. Members to speak, but it is worth giving up several other issues that I wanted to raise to make several causes for thought.

I should like to pick up on one issue in relation to Glasgow. I note that £130,000 has been spent on a glossy magazine to inform people about what the City of Glasgow council sets out to do. I see the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) nodding his head and saying that that is great. He obviously approves.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I did not say a word.

Mr. Gallie: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman approves. He and his hon. Friends have criticised the Government for spending £600,000 on advertising the nursery voucher system. The public need to be advised about the system so that they know how to use it. That is

[Mr. Gallie]

purely an information exercise. If it is good enough for Glasgow to spend £130,000 on a relatively small number of the Scottish people—

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Has a Minister asked you whether it is possible for him to come to the House to apologise for a statement made during Environment questions this afternoon? I have had telephone calls from my constituents, whose interests I am sure that you wish to protect. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), said that Bristol city councillors were increasing their allowances by 66 per cent. and that they were going to build a flagship building with turrets at a cost of £1 million. Neither of those statements is true—they are both misleading. Is it possible for the Minister to come to the House to set the *Hansard* record straight today?

Madam Deputy Speaker: In answer to the hon. Lady's first question, I have received no such notification. As far as the substance of her complaint is concerned, it is not for the Chair to adjudicate on the accuracy of statements made by any hon. Member—Minister or otherwise. The hon. Lady has made her point.

Mr. Gallie: Picking up on that point of order, I should like to talk about councillors' allowances. The number of councillors in Scotland has been reduced in recent times by about one third. We now have 1,245 councillors, of whom 739 receive special allowances. One might think that the level of special allowances would have reduced, but the level of councillors' allowances has gone up from £7.1 million to £13.3 million—the figure has almost doubled. We are told that there is not a lot of money in local authorities. I should have thought that councillors would have considered those special allowances.

The situation in East Ayrshire astounds me. The council has 30 members—almost all of whom are Labour—and 29 special allowances are available to councillors. There is something wrong there. Authorities should consider that issue when complaining about lack of funds.

The independent Peida report, put together with Coopers and Lybrand, shows that planning departments in Scotland cost 60 per cent. to 70 per cent. more than those in England. I accept the comments by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) that sometimes more detailed analysis is needed. I have considered the planning development department in my area of South Ayrshire. Small shopkeepers who have tried to put up reasonable signs in a way that would enhance town centres have been constantly badgered by planning officials to stick to petty, small-minded rulings. There is something wrong there.

Mr. Kirkwood: What has that got to do with it?

Mr. Gallie: Planning departments spend a heck of a lot of local authority money. They are getting involved with petty matters and having a major effect on the expansion of town centres.

At Towans hotel in my constituency, the council insisted on keeping a dilapidated building occupied—it was empty but occupied by an owner. Demolition and redevelopment of the site would obviously have been a better course. The inevitable happened—the building burnt—but the site remains dilapidated. Opposition Members are always shouting about the need for more houses. Additional houses are being missed out on that site.

South Ayrshire council did not seek to operate a pilot project for nursery vouchers. Instead, it has provided its own nursery scheme, building on the number of places available. Will my hon. Friend the Minister tell me whether that means that when cash is allocated for the voucher scheme in the coming year, South Ayrshire council will miss out because there will be a removal of previously funded amounts for nursery schemes provided in local authorities that have nursery places?

I am particularly concerned about community care. I do not understand how local authorities can be providers, competitors for places in nursing homes and residential homes and decision makers on spending plans for community care. My hon. Friends in the Government need to look carefully at that. There is considerable waste in the current workings of community care. The costs of keeping individuals in their homes are not always fully considered. Health costs are totally ignored. We must take that on board. I very much regret that community care funds have not been ring-fenced.

Finally, I have one comment on capping. I have some sympathy with the comments of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. I pointed out to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) that 65 per cent. of local government funding comes from general taxation. He suggested that the figure was 85 per cent., but the extra 20 per cent. came from the old non-domestic rating element. Irrespective of that fact, local authorities raise only 15 per cent. of local expenditure. Somewhere along the line, there will be a time when the cap should be removed. At that point, local authorities will take responsibility for financial aspects, which would be a jolly good thing.

6.17 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I am disappointed and angry about the way in which the debate has been conducted. The hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) talked about people knowing when they had been short-changed. In many ways, that is what has happened to them. The debate has been reduced to issues such as who has not contributed to the debate and some stuff about whether councillors have gone on foreign trips. We are discussing the most important subject facing the Scottish people. The decisions will affect the essential daily services for every man, woman and child in Scotland. They deserve a better debate.

The debate should have been about the kind of local government system that we all seek, about the level of local government services and about employment. It should also have been about democratic control of local decisions. Instead, public opinion has been ignored and dismissed. The Government have never admitted the consequences of their actions, but the people know who is to blame for cuts in services and employment. The Minister has dwelt on trivia, probably deliberately, rather than on substance.

The truth is that local government is totally controlled by central Government. Some 75 per cent. of its services are determined by central Government, as is 85 per cent.

of its revenue. Central Government place capping limits on local government and control its capital spend. Local authorities are not free to take decisions, because they are dominated by central Government decisions. The Government have created the current local government crisis.

We are debating next year's local government finance orders just days before local authorities announce their budgets in the light of what is widely recognised to be the worst local government settlement on record. Throughout Scotland, services are being squeezed, while, at the same time, councils are having to contemplate huge rises in council tax and huge increases in service charges. Even the better-off councils—there are now only a few—are running simply to stand still.

The cash crisis is primarily the result of the accumulated effect of long-term underfunding coupled with the failure of the Scottish Office to meet the costs of reorganisation or provide the resources necessary to meet the new statutory obligations that it has placed on local authorities. Although the Secretary of State continues to build into the settlement assumed savings from reorganisation, his assumptions have been totally discredited by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy study, which remains unchallenged. It found that, since 1995–96, the botched attempt to gerrymander has cost Scottish local government £281 million—almost four times the Scottish Office's estimate. Yet again, the Government's figures have been shown to be pure financial fantasy.

Even the Scottish Office has had to admit that new statutory obligations faced by local authorities, including those under the care in the community policy, the landfill tax, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, total more than £90 million. The Government have failed to provide new resources to meet those new obligations. As a result, councils are faced with having to make staggering cuts of about £350 million—even before taking into account the effect of the 75 per cent. housing debt repayment rules, which have so devastated Scottish council housing provision.

The Minister repeated the Tory boast that grant-aided expenditure next year would increase by 2.2 per cent., with a corresponding rise of 1.1 per cent. in grant support. That is a blatant and foolhardy attempt to mask the extent of the cuts. The Minister has failed absolutely to convince anyone. When transfers, new burdens and pay awards are left out and like is compared with like, it becomes clear that grant support is being reduced by 2.1 per cent. in cash terms. His increase is in reality a reduction.

The Secretary of State tried to steal the show at the Scottish Grand Committee with the announcement that he would permit 15 councils, including my own Angus council, to increase their spending levels by £10 million under the capping regime. He was, however, much less up-front about the fact that the capping relaxation was not accompanied by any new resources. So, it is good news for us but bad news for the others. It is a simple case of divide and rule.

The Secretary of State is trying to dictate to local authorities where the money will go, prioritising spending on the police, fire services, education and health without providing any additional resources to match those priorities. To increase spending according to Scottish Office directions while remaining within capping limits, local authorities will have to reduce expenditure on every other service. Those are the actual consequences of the Government's proposals.

Surely it is not for the Secretary of State to decide how local authorities should spend public money. Councillors are not Government appointees on quangos, however much he would wish them to be. I accept that the notion of democratic accountability might seem rather peculiar to the Government. The Scottish National party believes that central Government should work in partnership with local government. Instead, the Tory Government seem determined to demolish local democracy at every turn. When the budgets are announced on Thursday, showing an increase in council tax that is estimated to be about 13 per cent., the Scottish people will know that local authorities are not to blame. The electorate will soon have the opportunity to show their contempt for the Government.

By means of a shameful party political propaganda exercise that cost taxpayers £235,000, the Secretary of State tried to argue that local government in Scotland is favourably treated; yet even the consultants who were commissioned to write the report gave it a health warning, urging "extreme caution" in making comparisons at any level of detail. In fact, when comparing like with like, there may be little difference at all in expenditure between Scotland and England.

Most of the expenditure variation is explained by differences in statutory responsibilities and funding mechanisms. Unique Scottish circumstances, such as its geography, climate and levels of deprivation, also lead to differences in need and the cost of meeting it. Any difference that remains is explained—even in the Coopers and Lybrand report—as the result of local councils' policy priorities. The priority in Scotland has clearly been to provide better services of higher quality than in England and Wales, particularly in education. The cuts imposed by the Government are leading to school closures and compulsory redundancies of teaching staff.

The Government should be ashamed of themselves for using the smokescreen of the per head of population figures to try to prove something that the Coopers and Lybrand report shows is fundamentally a sham. Given the spending of £235,000 on the report and £800,000 on nursery voucher propaganda, it is a great pity that the Secretary of State is not half as willing to defend Scotland's record of better standards as he is to squander public money on shameless Tory propaganda. As well as reflecting councils' policy priorities, the higher standard of service provision must surely also reflect the policy priorities of the Scottish people. In that regard, what the Secretary of State's propaganda report may explain above all else is why there are no longer any Tory councils in Scotland. The money would have been better spent on services.

It is nonsense for the Government to rant about relative spending without considering relative revenue. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury admitted that, when Scotland's share of oil revenues is taken into account along with our share of privatisation proceeds, far from being subsidised, Scotland has paid a massive £27 billion surplus to the London Treasury since 1979. The Government's figures give the lie to the Tory subsidy myth. Over the next five years, a surplus of £12.5 billion will be generated. Why are we talking about cuts when such resources would be available to an independent Scotland?

[Mr. Andrew Welsh]

Regardless of the debate over the reports, the findings of the report of the Planning, Industrial and Economic Development Advisers, which was commissioned by COSLA, highlight the devastating impact of the Government's cuts on the Scottish economy. It is perhaps significant that COSLA used the same consultancy firm as that commissioned by the Scottish Office. Perhaps the Secretary of State should accept the Pieda report, which points out that the cuts about which the Minister avoids talking will result in as many as 17,000 job losses in Scotland and the loss of £315 million from Scottish household incomes. That puts into context the trivia that the Minister has introduced into this debate in trying to avoid the reality. The cuts will be made regardless of the outcome of the debate on comparative expenditure and are a direct result of Government cuts. In a wealthy nation, there can be absolutely no justification for running Scottish local government services into the ground.

As for new, blue Labour, it has made it abundantly clear that it will do nothing to stem the financial crisis—a slap in the face that has sent its own people reeling. I deeply regret the fact that the Labour leadership seems to lack the imagination, integrity and political will to fight for Scotland, and is content instead to allow Scotland to run down while taking orders from its Thatcherite leaders in London. Labour will not escape the judgment of the Scottish people. Opinion polls show that, since the announcement of the Brown bombshell, support for new Labour has fallen dramatically by six points, with the SNP closing the gap.

The SNP has a fully costed commitment to restore services lost in local government cuts. We will provide Scottish local authorities with an extra £1.4 billion over the first four years of an independent Scottish Parliament. Local authorities need neither a seventh cavalry nor a slap in the face. They need a party that is committed to defending Scotland and investing in public services—working in partnership with local government, not against it. Only the SNP can be trusted to achieve those goals, and only independence will allow Scotland access to its wealth to secure the future of local government and to maintain its high standards of local services. I look forward to that day.

6.29 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): I can tell the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) that to describe me as new or blue is a distortion of the facts, and I think most hon. Members would accept that. I was surprised that the Minister began the debate by referring to the opinion poll in *The Herald* today. That poll showed Labour leading its nearest rivals in Scotland by 20 per cent. Even worse for the Tories, our nearest rivals are the SNP—not the Tories, who are even further behind in Scotland than in England.

The Minister also ran the danger of drawing hon. Members' attention to the other poll in *The Herald* in which readers were invited to vote for a fantasy Cabinet in a Scottish Parliament. The Secretary of State for Scotland is one of the most hated figures in Scotland, but he has a positive rating of eight. The Minister has a negative rating of minus five, so it was a mistake for him to begin his speech by referring to those polls.

The Minister also said that his claim—that every council in Scotland will be able to increase expenditure this year—bore repeating. Indeed, he claimed that councils in Scotland would get an additional £140 million—including some £60 million directly from the Government—or an increase of 2.2 per cent. That claim bears repeating only to show that the Minister is a barefaced manipulator of the facts. It makes no allowance for the fact that the capping limits, imposed by the Government, allow for an increase of £75 million, not £140 million. That is an increase of 1.2 per cent., or half the rate of inflation.

The claim also makes no allowance for the pay awards that are agreed nationally between councils and trade unions and that councils are expected to implement. The settlement does not contain a single penny for those pay awards. It also does not make allowances for the new burdens that have been placed on local authorities, to which many hon. Members have already referred. The Scottish Office claimed that the cost of those burdens would be £90 million, but the settlement does not contain a penny to cover that cost.

Far from taking account of the costs of local government reorganisation and its impact on councils such as Dundee, the Government assume savings for local government from the reorganisation, but those savings do not exist. The Minister's claim was bogus and shows once again that the people of Scotland, and everyone else, cannot trust the Tories' claims.

The Minister also spoke of his trips abroad and tried to justify his trip to Korea by saying that he had brought back more than 4,000 jobs through the Chunghwa investment in Lanarkshire. What arrogance for that insignificant figure on the Front Bench to assume that a multinational company would make a major inward investment decision because he happened to visit there. The arrogance of the man is breathtaking. Nobody in Scotland believes for a minute that he is responsible for inward investment in Lanarkshire or anywhere else.

The Minister is personally responsible for jobs in Scotland through the current local government financial settlement and the one that we are debating tonight. Those financial settlements will mean the loss of 17,000 jobs across Scotland in local government. The Minister may dismiss those jobs as not real if he thinks that we do not need people who look after the elderly, home helps, teachers or people who work in family and child centres. Even if we accept his boast about the 4,000-plus jobs he has provided, he is still responsible for a net loss of 13,000 jobs. I wonder if he will apologise to the people of Scotland for his disgraceful record.

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): The Minister is not listening.

Mr. McAllion: He is not listening because he prefers debates in which only he and his hon. Friends speak. The debate has lasted three hours, and an hour and a half has been taken up by Tories who have kept Labour Members out because they do not want to face reality. They want to cower and hide in the Chamber because they are frightened to face the people in a general election. They are hanging on by their fingernails until the last possible moment, hoping that we will blow it and their bacon will be saved. It will not happen and everybody in Scotland is waiting for the moment when they can pay back all the Tory Ministers and Tory Back Benchers for the misery of the past 18 years.

Another example of the Minister's distortion of the truth was when he said that it was fascinating that COSLA intended an increase in spending of £500 million. The actual figure calculated by COSLA was £414 million. COSLA also admitted that, even if it used tricks such as phasing and delaying implementation—and other devices that it has learnt over the years to try to cushion Tory cuts—the increase is only £180 million, or less than half the figure that the Minister proclaimed. The Minister cannot be trusted. I cannot say what he is, because of the arcane rules of the House, but everybody in Scotland knows what he is. If he repeats any of his statements outside, he will be accused of being a barefaced—I cannot say what he is.

The Minister referred to his meeting with Glasgow city council and he said, in another example of the way in which he twists and manipulates everything, that the council was effectively asking for other councils to get less so it could get more. The key word is "effectively". I know that Glasgow city council asked for no such thing, but the Minister pretends that it did.

I accompanied a delegation from Dundee city council when it met the Minister. The delegation included councillors and people from local authority trade unions, the churches and voluntary organisations. It also included people from Dundee and Tayside chamber of commerce—who are normally on the Government's side, but who were on Dundee's side that time. We patiently explained the cuts that had been implemented in Dundee as a result of the financial settlement. We described the closure of six primary and two secondary schools. I remember a television debate in which the Minister said that there was no reason to close any school in Scotland because of the financial settlement. Eight schools have been closed in my area and many other schools have been closed, but the Minister has never withdrawn that statement.

Dundee has also seen a 37.5 per cent. increase in school meals charges in the past two years. Rich people can afford that increase. Another 30p or 40p from their purse makes little difference, and their kids will still get decent school meals. Poor people, who are just above the income support level, cannot afford that increase, and it could mean that their kids do not get a school meal. We hear no apologies from Tories for that. Staffing levels in schools have also been reduced. We are told that education is a priority, but the financial settlement means the loss of 50 teachers in Dundee.

Dundee has also had to start charging for home helps. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) mentioned home helps in Springburn. My mother was a home help in Springburn and I know the great work that home helps do. Previously, their services were free in Dundee, but we have had to start charging, and that means that old folk cannot afford them. Cuts have been made in voluntary organisations and concessionary travel schemes—the list goes on. The council tax increases that go with the cuts are even more savage. Morally, ethically, socially and economically, the financial settlement is unacceptable, and no hon. Member who genuinely has the interests of his constituents at heart could argue for it.

We explained all that to the Minister at the meeting. Everyone agreed that he was not interested. Only twice did he show a spark of interest in what anyone said. The first time was when he thought that someone had said that other services in the Scottish Office bloc should be cut to pay for extra funding for local government: he immediately came to life and asked what other services should be cut. The second time was when he thought that someone had said that other councils should get less so that Dundee could get more: again, he became very excited and pleased.

Those are the same old Tory tactics of divide and rule, turning council against council and service against service, while insisting that public services have to be reduced and that the poor people who depend on them must pay the price because the kind of people who vote Tory can buy privately and do not have to depend on the councils. That is the hidden agenda.

The Minister issued a challenge to us to say what other services should be cut in the Scottish Office bloc. That bloc is between £14 billion and £15 billion—an awful lot of money—but its level is decided by the Cabinet, not from on high by God; it is not irreversible, and the Cabinet can decide what formula should be applied and how much money is needed. If the Secretary of State cannot win a better deal for Scotland, he should not be the Secretary of State for Scotland: someone else should be in his place.

Let us stop arguing about bogus points in this bogus forum. Let us go to the country and let the people decide who can best be trusted.

6.40 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): Once again, we have seen the Government playing politics with local government in the vain hope that Labour councils, or even Opposition Front Benchers, will get the blame. I remind them gently that they have been in charge for 18 years and that this local government settlement, the worst for more than 20 years, is the final monument to 18 years of low growth, boom-bust instability and economic failure.

The terms of the debate were set by the Minister, in 46 minutes of obfuscation, fiddles, smokescreen and absurdity. There are two facts that he cannot avoid. First, the job losses and service cuts that he described, in a climax of absurdity, as imaginary, are felt by people throughout Scotland: both those who have suffered this year—6,709 job losses, according to the Pieda report—and those who will be affected by the further job losses and service cuts that will be forced on local councils this week. Secondly, the people in Scotland now understand full well that the Secretary of State controls the service levels via capping and the council tax increases via grant distribution.

There are two ways of comparing this year's Government grant with next year's: in cash terms or in real terms. The simple way is to compare in straight cash terms. Whichever way we look at it, there has been a cash cut for next year compared with this year: the Red Book put it at £50 million, because of estimated outturn; the public expenditure statement in December put it at £25 million; and, even if we strip out the police loan charges and the urban programme specific grant, it is £17 million.

There has certainly been a cash cut, but the Minister talks of a £60 million increase in Government grant. The only way to arrive at that figure is by the imaginary savings from local government reorganisation that nobody

[Mr. Malcolm Chisholm]

who has studied the subject believes in. The reality is that, as the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy report pointed out, local government reorganisation has cost council tax payers in Scotland £281 million, and they are still paying a reorganisation surcharge in their bills for this year and next year.

The Minister asserted that the amount that can be spent on services will increase next year by 2.2 per cent. Again, the figures can be compared in cash terms or in real terms. In cash terms, the increase is 0.8 per cent., but in real terms we must take account of the new burdens that will be faced by local government next year, and even the Government admit that those burdens will amount to £90 million.

The Government like to talk about disappearing old burdens, such as the £26 million in nursery vouchers, but it is totally illogical to talk about that without balancing against it the £90 million of new burdens that even the Government admit to; the large cut in cash terms becomes a massive cut when we take new burdens into account.

I am glad that the Minister has stopped all the nonsense about uncollected poll tax and council tax that he was going on about a few weeks ago to try to muddy the waters, although he clearly did not understand the Government's rules about such uncollected tax. The reality is that single-tier local government in Scotland is called the Secretary of State for Scotland: he determines the service and grant levels.

That, of course, will change after the general election. One of our main reasons for wanting a Scottish Parliament is so that such decisions can be taken in an open, democratic manner, rather than by one person in the Scottish Office. *[Interruption.]*

The Under–Secretary, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), is fond of sedentary interventions. Throughout the Minister's speech, he kept shouting at the Opposition Front Bench and telling us that we should raise taxes; he was obviously upset about the fact that the Labour party has no intention of raising taxes. Unlike the Tory party, which raised expectations before the general election and taxes after, we are in the business of telling the truth before the general election, and only one tax after: the windfall tax.

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): Tartan tax.

Mr. Chisholm: Wrong again. We shall raise the windfall tax, to deal with youth unemployment, which will be our priority when we come into government.

We shall have to attend to the building blocks of economic success as a priority after the election, because the underlying cause of the grant cuts and the crisis in local government is the Government's economic failure. We also plan in the first year of a Labour Government to deal with the problem of waste and to examine priorities. My right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party has said that his priorities are education, education and education. That is good news for local government, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) pointed out.

Once again, Ministers have tried to act as if we were the Government and they the Opposition. That will soon be the case, but they are still the Government tonight and all their attempts to blame somebody else for their failures will not be believed by the people of Scotland. Anyone who had managed to sit through the Minister's 46 minutes would not have been persuaded by any of his arguments. His tactic was to try to confuse by putting up smokescreens and descending into absurdity. This will be the last local government settlement from this Government. If tonight's performance by the Minister is anything to go by, it is certainly time for a change of tack.

My main fire has been directed at the Government, who are responsible for the settlement, but I should point out that the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) was equally in a world of fantasy. He and his party made all kinds of promises about what they would do for local government, centring on the claim that they would put £1.4 billion into local government to deal with the crisis, but that is not a credible option and the people of Scotland will not believe it. The Scottish National party makes many spending promises, but never tells us where the money will come from. Labour is the party with a credible alternative.

Mr. Welsh: The hon. Gentleman cannot get away with that, and he will find exactly where the money is coming from if he cares to look at our detailed documents—something that his party has never produced. He offers Scottish local authorities no improvement, because he is dealing with a Scottish Office budget. We are promoting a Scottish national budget, and there is a massive difference between the two.

Mr. Chisholm: My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) referred to Santa Claus when the hon. Gentleman was speaking. The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) referred to the planet Zog the other night, and that is where the Scottish National party belongs, with its plans to magic away debt, its conjuring up of massive surpluses by the loading of one parliamentary question, the way in which it made Scotland leap up the international prosperity table from 22nd to eighth in two months and its confetti spending pledges that it scatters with no tax costs.

That point has to be made, because the real choice before the Scottish people at the next election is between the Government and the Labour party. Labour is the only party that can get rid of the Government and is the only party with credible alternatives to deal with the economic and local government crises that 18 years of Conservative government have delivered to Scotland.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I call Mr. Kynoch.

Mr. Maxton: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Under–Secretary of State for Scotland has had 46 minutes in the debate already. May I ask why the Secretary of State, who is his boss and is sitting next to him, is not answering the debate? If he is too frightened to reply, perhaps the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson)—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have called the Minister and it is a matter for him to reply if he so wishes.

6.50 pm

Mr. Kynoch: We have had the usual local government debate, as I described in my introduction. All Opposition Members have used their usual ploy of calling for more funding and saying that local government is suffering cuts. Thankfully, that is not the case, and we have given extra funding to local government. Of course, that is not our money, but taxpayers' money—something the Labour party always seems to forget.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), and to my hon. Friends the Members for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) and for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), who made rational and realistic speeches. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside referred to a review of grant-aided expenditure formulae with particular reference to rural areas. I can tell them that, with COSLA, we are carrying out a review of GAE formulae, but there has been agreement on both sides that it will be appropriate to do that only once proper financial information is available from the new local authorities. It is quite clear that many authorities have taken a long time this year to make financial information available, so that councils and councillors know what is going on in their areas.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries referred to the business rate and welcomed the fact that we had introduced the uniform business rate, which he rightly recognised has ensured that businesses north and south of the border can compete on a level playing field. In addition, we have ensured that business rates are frozen for businesses with a rateable value of less than £10,000. The Finance Bill proposes benefits for villages and village shops, and we believe that we are looking after small businesses.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood referred to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), who said that the people of Bearsden and Kelvinside were all parasites feeding off Glasgow.

Mrs. Fyfe: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kynoch: I will let the hon. Lady correct the remark.

Mrs. Fyfe: I asked the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) in a civil manner—and would appreciate a civil reply—whether he had calculated by how much the people of Eastwood benefit from services provided by Glasgow for which they do not pay.

Mr. Kynoch: I am delighted to hear the hon. Lady rephrase that. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) is shouting from a sedentary position.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister has attributed to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) the word "parasite". That is clearly untrue, and I hope that even this Minister might have the decency to withdraw that remark under your guidance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I heard nothing of that nature. *[Interruption.]* Order. It is a matter for the Minister if he feels that he ought to withdraw the remark.

Mr. Kynoch: If I referred to anything that the hon. Lady did not actually say, I apologise.

Mrs. Fyfe: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Just for clarification, I did not utter the word "parasite", so the Minister is wrong to attribute the word to me.

Mr. Kynoch: As I have just said, if I said anything that the hon. Lady did not say, I apologise and withdraw that statement. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) has significant cheek in coming to the House at the tail end of the debate and with no intention of contributing to it, but—in his usual manner—raising irrelevant points of order.

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I have just achieved the rare feat of drawing an apology from a Tory Minister, it was well worth coming in at any stage of the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for the Chair. The House must settle down.

Mr. Kynoch: I should like to continue in a positive vein. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood referred obliquely—as did the hon. Members for Maryhill and for Springburn—to the fact that people around Glasgow use facilities in Glasgow. As I explained to the hon. Members for Springburn and for Maryhill, the GAE formulae take account of commuter traffic and people visiting from outside Glasgow. However, there is no doubt that that matter will be looked at in the general review of GAE.

I can tell hon. Members who represent urban areas that I get as many complaints from hon. Members representing rural areas, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside complained that the GAE formulae do not benefit rural areas. I saw that the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) agreed with what they were saying, which shows that the same views are held on either side of the fence.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside also referred to increasing school numbers and their effect on the formulae for education GAE. I responded to that this year, by urging the distribution committee of COSLA and the Scottish Office to look at updating the information on school rolls within the GAE formulae. I am delighted to say that this year the most up-to-date information will be used, which is the school roll as at September this year. The formulae now take account of rising school numbers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr referred to nursery vouchers and said that Labour wants to snatch away those vouchers, which give choice to parents. Vouchers provide £1,100 of opportunity to choose where nursery education is obtained, and I do not think that parents—certainly not the parents in my constituency—will approve of what the Labour party wants to do. I am certain from the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood that his experiences prove that point clearly.

In his introductory remarks—which, incidentally, were heard by only 13 of the 49 Labour Members of Parliament who represent Scotland—the hon. Member for Hamilton

[Mr. Kynoch]

(Mr. Robertson) clearly referred to the fact that this was a poor settlement. He talked about new burdens, removing compulsory competitive tendering and an independent review of the relationship between central and local government. But the key question that he did not answer was: if he is so critical of the settlement, what funding would he give if he was in power?

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The funding is the Government's responsibility.

Mr. Kynoch: It is a responsibility that we delight in taking. We believe that we should be the trustees of the taxpayer and that we should give a sensible and reasonable settlement to local government. That we believe we have done.

We heard a remarkable admission from the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), who said that if my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland could not get a better settlement, he should not be Secretary of State for Scotland. What the hon. Member for Dundee, East said, in effect, was that the hon. Member for Hamilton is not fit to be Secretary of State, because he has said that he does not intend to provide more money to local government.

There was much scaremongering about cuts in the debate. Reference was made to the fact that notice has been given to employees, but councils have said that they were issued simply to cover legal liability. That does not mean that any posts will be cut.

I was disappointed that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) did not recognise that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I responded positively to his request to ease capping limits for low-spending councils. He got almost an extra £1 million of spending power, which at least his convenor, Mr. Andrew Tulley, recognised was welcome.

In the debate, Conservative Members clearly laid out the ground rules. We have given a sensible and reasonable settlement to local government in Scotland. We have had nothing but the usual annual criticism from the Opposition. Their only solution is a tax-raising Scottish Parliament. Where will the £78 million for that come from?

It being Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [28 February].*

The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 256.

Division No. 87] **[7 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter

Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair–Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. Sebastian Coe.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin–Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chapman, James *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dixon, Rt Hon Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'ld)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan

Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Turner and
Mr. Joe Benton.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1997, dated 12th February 1997, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Resolved,

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1997, dated 12th February 1997, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the Special Grant Report (Scotland) on Supplementary Mismatch Scheme Grant for 1997–98 (HC 272), which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the Special Grant Report (Scotland) on Grant in aid of building works at Dunblane Primary School and Grant in aid of Local Authority revenue costs resulting from the Dunblane tragedy (HC 273), which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

Housing (Scotland)

7.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): I beg to move,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 22nd January, be approved.

This is the annual opportunity for the House to debate the housing support grant order. The debate provides an opportunity to consider not only the detail of the orders, but wider issues relating to housing and housing finance.

The order provides that the total level of housing support grant payable to Scottish local authorities next year will be £15.2 million. Grant for mainstream council housing totalling £11.9 million will be paid to three authorities—Highland, Shetland and Western Isles. Broadly speaking, that sum represents the difference between the eligible expenditure and the relevant income of those authorities which, in the absence of grant, would have a deficit on their housing revenue accounts. Its purpose and the assumptions used are explained in detail in the report that accompanies the order.

The housing support grant order also includes an element—the hostels portion—that provides a contribution towards the running costs of local authority hostels for the homeless. Hostels grant will total £3.3 million to be paid to 20 authorities across Scotland, which will help to support around 2,300 places for homeless persons.

The 1997–98 grant calculations assumed expenditure of £834 per house on the management and maintenance of the housing stock. This represents an 8.2 per cent. increase over the equivalent figure for the current year, and brings the estimate into line with authorities' actual expenditure in 1996–97. For the purpose of the housing support grant formula, the assumed average standard rent for next year has been increased by only 2 per cent., to £39.38 per week, in line with the general rate of inflation.

I should also stress that that is not a forecast of rent levels, nor is it a guideline or recommendation; it is simply an assumption used solely for the grant calculation. Actual rents charged by authorities are, of course, a matter for local decision, and with so few authorities now qualifying for grant in respect of their housing costs, subsidy decisions have little impact on these decisions.

I understand that some authorities propose to increase rents well ahead of inflation. It will be for them to justify those increases to their tenants. Local authorities should consider very carefully the consequences for tenants of increasing rents substantially. I remind the House that the average local authority rent in Scotland in the current year, at £31.28 per week, is well below the English equivalent of £40.06.

As hon. Members will be aware, housing support grant has declined steadily since the early 1980s, in line with the Government's policy of moving away from such indiscriminate subsidies and targeting resources towards those tenants who are most in need through the housing benefit system. In the current year, it is estimated that council house tenants in Scotland who are unable to afford the full cost of their housing will receive rent rebates totalling £587 million. Housing benefit assistance will continue to be available for those who need help with their housing costs.

With only three authorities now qualifying for grant in respect of their mainstream housing, exploratory discussions have taken place with Shetland, the Western Isles and Highland councils with a view to reducing their housing debt to manageable levels and thereby removing the on-going need for HSG subsidy. Those discussions culminated in my right hon. Friend's announcement on Budget day of the Government's intention to commute a portion of the housing debt of the three councils.

The proposal is to convert the annual HSG subsidy paid to the councils into a capital grant and use that money to reduce the councils' outstanding debt to a level where they will no longer require subsidy. The on-going cost of servicing the debt would be offset against future HSG provision.

Rather than continuing to operate the current rather cumbersome HSG procedures for only three authorities, the Government consider that the early redemption of debt would be a more efficient use of available resources. The debt redemption proposals would place the housing revenue accounts of the three authorities on a firmer footing. Subject to detailed negotiations with the three councils, we would hope to redeem the debt before the end of the 1997–98 financial year.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): Will the Minister give an assurance that agreement will be reached with the councils, and that no formula or solution will be imposed upon them?

Mr. Robertson: I give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. That is why we are not acting right away: we want to talk to the councils and take them with us every step of the way.

I also draw the attention of the House to the question of general fund contributions. Such contributions represent a subsidy from council tax payers to council tenants. Like HSG, this kind of subsidy is indiscriminate, in that it benefits all tenants regardless of their personal circumstances. It is also unnecessary, as tenants who are unable to meet the costs of their housing receive assistance in the form of housing benefit.

Therefore, as has been the case in recent years, the Housing Revenue Account General Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order 1997, which was laid before the House on 3 February, prevents authorities from budgeting to make general fund contributions to the housing revenue account next year.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Minister provide an assurance that he will be sympathetic to the representations made by Inverclyde council? Not long ago, the Minister of State visited an area of Greenock that is bedevilled by very serious housing problems. There are equally grave housing problems elsewhere in Greenock and Port Glasgow. I hope that the Minister will treat those representations as sympathetically as his hon. Friend did some 18 months ago.

Mr. Robertson: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I treat sympathetically and sensitively all representations made to me.

I believe that the Government's proposals for housing support grant next year constitute a fair and reasonable subsidies package that balances the interests of the tenants, the council tax payer and the national taxpayer. I commend the order to the House.

7.22 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): The Conservative party has waged a vendetta against council housing for 18 years, culminating in the Minister's open admission that he wants to see every council house in Scotland sold off and transferred to the private sector. He claims that that should happen with the consent of tenants.

However, we can be absolutely certain that, if this Government were returned for a fifth term, they would put the screws on council tenants even tighter, and force them out of the council sector and into the hands of private landlords. That would not be considered if there had been a Labour Government or a Scottish Parliament for the past 18 years. Housing will be the responsibility of a Scottish Parliament, and Scottish people who are concerned about housing cannot wait for the return of a Labour Government and the establishment of a Scottish Parliament.

The facts about housing—particularly council housing—speak for themselves. Since 1979, there has been a net decline of 343,000 houses available for rent in Scotland. Last year, local authorities built only 308 new homes. At the same time, about 185,000 households are on local authority housing waiting lists, and the number of households applying to local authorities as homeless has more than doubled over 10 years, from 20,000 to more than 41,000. About 1,000 people sleep rough in Scotland each night.

Since the present Prime Minister took office nearly seven years ago, housing investment in Scotland has been cut by 39 per cent. in real terms. If investment since 1990 had simply kept pace with inflation, there would have been enough money to build an extra 26,500 affordable homes. The house condition survey was conducted during that period, and the facts it revealed are chillingly familiar: 95,000 houses in Scotland below the tolerable standard, 580,000 houses in urgent need of repair and 267,000 houses affected by dampness, including an estimated one in three council houses.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Is it not true that 18,000 homes were built in Scotland in each of the past three years? Is it not also projected that 130,000 homes will be required in the next 10 years? On that basis, are the Government not on target to meet anticipated need?

Mr. Chisholm: The hon. Gentleman should do his sums again. Average new build in the housing association and the council sector has averaged about 4,000 in each of the past 10 years, compared with an average of 12,000 a year under Labour in the 1970s.

Housing is also a health problem. I have the advantage of being responsible for the areas of housing and health, and I frequently point out in health debates that, if people did not live in cold, damp homes, it would have a beneficial effect on the health of the nation.

There is another reason why the distinction that the Secretary of State tries to make between health and local government is completely phoney. Local government is crucially involved in health delivery via community care, but also through housing and other areas that are very important when considering the causes of illness.

This order represents a further turn of the screw, with the housing support grant cut by more than 20 per cent. relative to last year. The order makes an unrealistic rent

[Mr. Chisholm]

assumption of £39.36, which is 26 per cent. above the current average in Scotland. It also makes inadequate allowance for management and maintenance.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: This debate is intended to inform the House, so that we may have a sensible and rational discussion. The hon. Gentleman has criticised the level of the HSG order and the rent and management and maintenance assumptions that I have made. Will he give his figures in that regard, so that we may compare my proposals with his in the time available?

Mr. Chisholm: As in the local government debate, Ministers are trying to turn the Opposition Front Bench into the Government. We are nearing the end of 18 years of vicious, downward-spiralling cuts in housing—particularly council housing—and the next Government will clearly have difficulty addressing that situation quickly. The people of Scotland want to know only that our priorities in government are totally different from those of the Minister.

The Minister said openly that he wants to sell off all council houses in Scotland. We say quite clearly that council housing will remain central to our policy. The Conservatives want to pursue a privatisation agenda in Scotland, but we will take a twin-track approach: council housing will remain central, but we shall also support and encourage new housing partnerships in order to secure additional investment. Tenants will play a central and crucial role in those partnerships—the Government do not allow that under their local housing company proposals—and investment will be additional, rather than a cover for massive cuts, as has occurred under this Government.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman obviously got a bit heated and carried away, but he did not answer my question. *[Interruption.]* I shall keep talking while the hon. Gentleman gets his lines from the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell), so that she does not need to whisper in his ear. Are we to take it that the Opposition are unwilling to tell us alternative figures to those in the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order, and that we shall therefore argue and debate blindly about what the Government intend to do, getting nothing in return from the Opposition?

Mr. Chisholm: Obviously, when we get into government, we shall have to examine very closely several factors that are relevant to housing. The first factor is the level of the public sector borrowing requirement and, alas, one of the problems that we shall need to confront is a public sector borrowing requirement of at least £26 billion.

If 1992 is anything to go by, the sum will be much larger, because then we were told that the PSBR would be £30 billion, and it was actually more than £45 billion. That is a serious constraint—*[Interruption.]* I am answering the Minister's question, if he would contain himself. That is a serious constraint on any Government's housing policy. It is not the situation that we would choose to inherit, but I remind the Government that that public sector borrowing requirement was run up by the Conservative Government; indeed, it is the final monument to their economic incompetence.

Obviously, we shall want to examine that. I shall talk about the 75 per cent. rule in a moment, so I shall touch on it only briefly now, by saying that we shall also want to consider the effect of the rule, including its effect on housing benefit. Obviously, when we have reviewed all that, we shall come up with specific proposals to start turning the crisis around, but, because of the vicious downward spiral that has continued for 18 years, there is no magic solution.

Once again, I refer briefly to the Scottish National party, which is committing a cruel deception on the Scottish people by pretending that housing debt can be magicked away. We realise that there is a serious problem of housing debt, but it cannot be magicked away, because, as this evening's figures show, the loan charges from housing debt run at more than £500 million a year, and in an independent Scotland, servicing that debt would put 3½p on income tax, quite apart from the many other SNP spending pledges.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I regret breaking into the hon. Gentleman's delusions, but I refer him to the policy document, which clearly sets out how that can be done. The Government have carried out a similar debt commutation for water services. If the hon. Gentleman had the imagination, he would realise that, when all Scotland's resources are available—given that we shall subsidise during the next five years by £12.5 billion, according to the Treasury's figures—those problems could be tackled. Under the hon. Gentleman's solution, there is no solution.

Mr. Chisholm: That was an interesting and important intervention, because it is the second, or possibly third, time that the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) has used the figure of £12.5 billion tonight. That figure is the Scottish National party election manifesto: everything depends on that. The SNP has tabled a parliamentary question that talks about £27 billion retrospectively. It has not received a parliamentary answer that talks about £12.5 billion, but the SNP has somehow managed to conjure that up.

The reality is that the SNP has made such an enormous number of spending commitments that they make any sense only if the SNP can conjure up massive surpluses, and that is the problem. On the point that the hon. Member for Angus, East made about debt commutation, of course debt can be commuted, but the debt must still be serviced; the loan charges must still be paid. In an independent Scotland, the loan charges on the present debt would be the equivalent of 3½p on income tax. I do not mind the SNP advancing that policy; I do mind it pretending that it is a no-cost option.

I return to the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order. Before the various interventions, I was talking about the unrealistic rent assumptions and inadequate management and maintenance allowance. That leads to the general subject of rents.

Since the Government came to power, average council house rents have increased by 535 per cent., compared with a general inflationary movement of 162 per cent. Although the housing support grant affects only a very few councils now, those rents will increase further as a result of the order, and also as a result of the 75 per cent. rule, which I want to discuss now.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): The hon. Gentleman appears to be au fait with all the figures. Would he care

to tell the House the value of housing benefit, and, specifically, the value of housing benefit that has gone into council house coffers, during the same period? That is still taxpayers' funds supporting council housing.

Mr. Chisholm: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman makes that point, because it was going to be my next but one point, and I am surprised that the Conservative party should want to highlight that, because housing benefit is crucial.

One problem is a lack of figures. I asked a parliamentary question about housing benefit on 29 January 1997, and I was told that housing benefit expenditure figures for Scotland were not available before 1988–89, which is unfortunate; but I shall refer to that question in a moment.

I shall first refer to another parliamentary question, the answer to which, by coincidence, was given to me on the same day at column *250*, which shows the full scale of the devastating cuts caused by the 75 per cent. rule—even greater than some housing lobbying organisations have said. In the detailed table on 29 January, I was told that, next year, gross council housing capital expenditure will fall from £341 million to £221 million—a devastating cut of 35 per cent.

I know too well that that will have a devastating effect on council houses in my constituency. Throughout Scotland, 30,000 houses will not have the central heating work, the window replacements or the other necessary modernisation that they require. That is the key problem with the 75 per cent. rule.

I shall now mention something that we are considering very carefully in our review of policy—the housing benefit effect of the 75 per cent. rule. I do not have all the information yet, but I have contacted every council in Scotland to ask a specific question: what element of this year's rent increases is there purely to plug the investment gap caused by the 75 per cent. rule?

In Edinburgh, for example, £1.86 million has been added to council house rents so that a small part of the necessary window programme, which would otherwise be wiped out by the 75 per cent. rule, can be carried out. I want to obtain those figures from every council in Scotland. Then, to balance against the 75 per cent. rule, we shall have a figure that tells us how much extra has been added to rents, and therefore how much extra has been spent on housing benefit because of the 75 per cent. rule. The Government have taken no account of that in imposing that rule.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman give a straight answer to the following question, which he did not give in the Scottish Grand Committee in Montrose? God forbid, if there were to be a Labour Government, what would he do about the 75 per cent. rule? Would the rule stay at 75 per cent., would it be reduced to or 30 per. cent. or 25 per cent., or would it be abolished completely?

Mr. Chisholm: I believe I have shown that we are taking a completely different approach to the matter; I cannot give a specific answer until I have done the research which the Minister has not bothered to do. He has imposed a 75 per cent. rule without even thinking of its implications for taxation via housing benefit.

We accept that the 75 per cent. rule has a PSBR effect. We shall be confronted by a massive PSBR resulting from the Government's economic incompetence; that is one element. The second element is the effect on housing modernisation, and a third element, which the Minister has forgotten, is the effect on housing benefit.

Unlike the Government, we acknowledge that there is a serious problem in the effect on modernisation and the effect on taxation via housing benefit. All that will be taken into account before we make a specific recommendation. The Government do not acknowledge the problem, because their fundamental reason for imposing the 75 per cent. rule was to force council houses into the private sector by starving the council sector of funds.

The Government have highlighted the fact that 72 per cent. of council tenants are on housing benefit, so one can be certain that the increase in housing benefit resulting from the 75 per cent. rule will be large. If we extrapolate the Edinburgh figure of £1.86 million, which is 5 per cent. of the council housing stock, and multiply that by 20, we are talking about almost £40 million, most of which is housing benefit. I do not know the final figures. We are examining the matter in detail.

Increased housing benefit is not just a public expenditure problem. The Government have shown in their housing policy that they are happy for rents to go up and for housing benefit to take the strain. That causes a public expenditure problem, and an affordability problem, with 72 per cent. of tenants on housing benefit. As rents go up, that creates deep poverty traps if people have such high rents that they cannot move from benefit into work.

Affordability is at the heart of our policy for public rented housing. If rented houses are not affordable, deep poverty traps are created. That is already beginning to happen in the housing association sector in England. With the reduction in housing association grant in England, people cannot afford to move from housing benefit into work. That is the last thing we want.

Affordability is the key factor in rented housing, together with security of tenure. When I speak to tenants, affordability is their main concern in relation to rented housing, but the Government have forgotten about that. Because so much of our economic strategy is based on the movement from welfare into work, we are particularly concerned about the tendency to let housing benefit take the strain and to let rents soar. We do not find that acceptable, on social or economic grounds.

Homelessness is more than just a housing problem. It will be eliminated only by getting the economy right and creating jobs. That is why our policy on youth unemployment is also a crucial housing policy. I emphasised in the previous debate that the one tax that we will impose early in the next Parliament is the windfall tax, which people in Scotland recognise is a just tax on the excess fat-cat profits of the privatised gas, electricity and water industries.

Mr. Wallace: As it may have some relevance, can the hon. Gentleman tell us what impact the windfall tax will have on Scottish Power and Scottish Hydro-Electric?

Mr. Chisholm: There will be a tax on the gas, electricity and water industries. Everyone knows about

[Mr. Chisholm]

their excess profits. The tax will not have any effect on prices for consumers. Those are excess profits, which we shall examine carefully.

Homelessness is closely related to economic development. Another aspect of the windfall tax will be the setting up of an environmental task force, which will carry out housing repairs as part of its remit. We have a many-pronged approach to the housing crisis, and that is one part of it.

There will be no magic-wand solution. Our priorities for housing are fundamentally different from those of the Conservatives. We shall end the vendetta against council housing. We shall continue to regard council housing as central, but we are open to new housing partnerships in order to secure additional investment. We shall pursue that twin-track approach to turn around the desperate crisis in Scottish housing, and provide people with the warm, decent homes that are an essential part of a civilised society.

7.43 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm). I hear once again proposals from the Opposition to establish yet another quango. Every argument that they ever advance seems to involve the creation of just one more of these bodies.

When the hon. Gentleman spoke about the windfall tax, he failed to address the point made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) with regard to the effect on the Scottish utilities. There have been no massive profits. The windfall tax suggested by the hon. Gentleman is a tax on fuel. That is what he means and what the effect would be, because the windfall tax would be passed on to the customer. People across Scotland should recognise that.

Mr. Bill Walker: As I understood the case presented by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm), the Opposition are talking about profits made in the past, but the tax would be levied on the current position of the companies and would therefore come out of present-day prices.

Mr. Gallie: My hon. Friend is right. The regulator has already confirmed that, and the hon. Gentleman must take it on board.

I was disappointed that the hon. Gentleman did not turn up at the Chartered Institute of Housing conference in Dundee on Thursday morning.

Mr. Chisholm: I was active on the Committee that considered the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill, which is a United Kingdom Bill, despite the fact that the Government did not recognise it as such and did not put a Scottish Office Minister on the Committee.

Mr. Gallie: I accept the hon. Gentleman's comment, but he is the shadow housing Minister for Scotland. I should have thought that he would attend that important conference in Dundee. He was missed by those who were there. Some thought that he was absent because he has recently had a hard time in Scotland on housing issues, principally because of the Labour party's change of tack. Despite his claim that Labour wants an improvement in housing stock in Scotland, any potential source of funding for that has dried up, following the comments of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) that there would be no other funding.

When the Opposition speak about the problem of housing, they miss an important change that has occurred in recent times—people's aspirations. It is recognised that 80 per cent. of people in Scotland want to be home owners. Since 1979, home ownership has risen from 35 per cent. to almost 60 per cent. People have put vast sums into the housing stock in Scotland. They have been pleased to invest their own money and take pride in their properties. That has meant that a burden has been lifted off the taxpayer. The public sector has to find less money to invest in bricks and mortar.

Another major change has occurred in regard to housing benefit. Before 1979, investment was falling: as we can all recall, the hammer had been put on Government expenditure by external sources. The realities of the economy demanded that public expenditure had to be cut. At that time the Labour Government were failing to invest in houses.

When the Conservatives became the Government in 1979, they examined the means of funding the array of public sector stock. Instead of funding bricks and mortar, they decided that it would be much fairer to fund individuals. People who needed support for housing received it through the housing benefit system. The present figure, as promoted by the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), is £587 million coming in through the housing benefit system in Scotland.

Our rents are 25 per cent. below levels in England. If Scottish and English rents were equated, there would be an additional £130 million income. That is £130 million that could be invested in public sector housing. Perhaps there are good reasons for the difference. The hon. Gentleman mentioned one—the difficulty of moving from benefit into work. Forcing up rent levels would create problems. Perhaps a halfway house could be found. However, there is money in the kitty that could be used if councils were prepared to charge levels of rent that would still be seen as reasonable.

The right-to-buy scheme introduced by the Government not only gave people pride, but created massive opportunities for work. The extra investment in housing by individuals created work not for the large housing contractors, but for the smaller ones. That has greatly benefited those seeking work in the service industries recently.

The Government made another major change. They went out of their way to try to identify the quality of housing in Scotland, and, through Scottish Homes, they have established a new "below tolerable standards" criterion. Since the first statistics were issued, improvements in housing stock have increased year by year. I believe that the money involved has been well spent.

Let me bring a pet issue to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister. I refer to this year's change with respect to the non-housing revenue account. We have now listened to COSLA, and have removed the requirement for local authorities to provide the private sector with

grants for repairs and maintenance. I think that that is wrong. You can bet your boots that now that local authorities have been given discretion, the money will go into the public sector. The private sector also needs improvement. People with their own homes who are not terribly well off need the grants that have helped cities such as Glasgow immensely over the years.

We should consider a specific aspect of housing in Scotland: sheltered housing. There are now 34,000 sheltered housing units in Scotland, while there were only some 2,000 or 3,000 in 1979. I am proud that the Conservative Government delivered in that regard; it is a pity that more people do not give them credit for it.

The order makes provision for hostels, and I am glad to see that south Ayrshire is on the list. However, I should like to hear the Minister's views on the homelessness legislation and the way in which it currently works. I feel that, in many instances, emphasis should be placed on hostel provision. My constituents and I are fed up with young girls who become pregnant, take advantage of the legislation and end up with houses. That is not fair to others on the waiting list, or, indeed, to the young girls concerned. They are pushed into unfriendly, sometimes hostile, environments, and are left on their own, surrounded by resentment. They are preyed on by their peers, and by others. Sheltered hostel accommodation for such people would be very welcome.

Dr. Godman: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that young girls become pregnant in order to acquire homes in the communities in which they live? Where is the evidence for such a malign comment?

Mr. Gallie: A number of 16 and 17-year-olds in my constituency have been housed under the legislation, and there is resentment among other constituents, some of whom have waited for six or seven years to be housed under the normal system. It is from my constituents that I get my evidence, and I tend to believe my constituents.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): If the hon. Gentleman really believes that a young woman becomes pregnant in order to live in a damp and virtually uninhabitable house in a grotty, rundown street, what does that say about the life that that young woman was living before?

Mr. Gallie: I do not think that the hon. Lady listened to what I said to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is now not listening in any case.

Dr. Godman: It is not true.

Mr. Gallie: I never claimed that young girls deliberately went out to get pregnant. What I am saying is that an extraordinary number of 16 and 17-year-old girls do get pregnant, and do end up being housed under the homelessness legislation. It would be far kinder to them, and to all concerned, to enable them to go into proper units where they would receive support—the support that their families should have given them, but cannot give them now.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gallie: I will, but time is short.

Mr. Walker *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Walker: I wonder whether there is a new system of ruling in the House. Do all occupants of the Chair understand that the chap who is on his feet has the right to speak?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I can assure the hon. Gentleman that all occupants of the Chair are fully aware of the procedures of the House, and carry them out.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I find it astonishing that one of your colleagues on the Chairmen's Panel should let you down in the way that he did.

Perhaps Opposition Members will tell us why this generation has such a huge problem of young single mothers.

Mr. Gallie: I well understand the point that my hon. Friend is making, but I do not want to follow that line. I have given my views, as, like every other hon. Member, I have a democratic right to do—irrespective of sedentary comments from some individuals who should know better.

It is said that the solution to all Scotland's housing problems is to establish a Scottish Parliament. Such a parliament will do nothing for Scotland's housing—except, perhaps, take away some of the resources that could be put into it. I do not see what a further level of politicians, bureaucracy and requirement for funds will do to help Scottish housing. It will merely absorb funds that could have been used to provide housing stock.

Finally, let me comment on the 75 per cent. rule mentioned by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm). Scotland has been in a privileged position in recent years: since the introduction of the right to buy, Scottish local authorities have been allowed to spend 100 per cent. of their capital receipts. That has not been the case south of the border or in Wales; I am not sure about Northern Ireland. It was left to local authorities to try to reduce council house debt, but, as my hon. Friend the Minister has said, they did not do so. At that point, some discretion must be removed. This year the figure is 25 per cent. Perhaps 75 per cent. was a little hefty, but if anyone is to take the blame, it must be the councils themselves, as they have failed to act responsibly.

7.57 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): We are grateful to the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) for reminding us of the political and philosophical gulf between the two sides of the House. If I understood him correctly, he proposed that pregnant single women should be housed in hostels rather than being given adequate and proper homes. I have no doubt that, were the impossible to happen and the Government survived another term, that policy would be implemented, and babies would be born in hostels. I am sure that the Conservatives would consider that an efficient way of saving money.

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

On a more positive note, let me take up what the Minister said in his opening speech about the current talks between the Scottish Office and local authorities—particularly Western Isles council—about the outstanding debt burden, which, in the case of Western Isles council, is about £40 million. I welcome the Minister's reassurance that the discussions with the council will be consensual, that there will not be an enforced solution to the matter and that he will seek to reach agreement with the council on how best to resolve it. In principle, that idea is worth supporting. I hope that the discussions will result in agreement.

It is worth pointing out that the debt was accumulated because of the huge shortage of public housing in the western isles. As a result of the failure of previous local authorities to tackle the problem, in the 1970s the newly created Western Isles council had to embark on a large house building programme, which has left it with a very large outstanding debt.

On a less positive note, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) mentioned the changes proposed to the 75 per cent. rule. The change is causing much concern to Western Isles council and it will impact on its ability to begin to tackle some of the huge problems that it faces in bringing its housing stock up to the standards that are required—and which should be demanded—of any local authority in this day and age.

I remind the Minister that it was his Government who issued guidelines that led to the housing conditions survey of 1991, which showed that 29 per cent. of council houses in the western isles suffered from serious dampness or disrepair. That is a phenomenal proportion. To repair those houses properly would require about £4 million-worth of improvements in the coming year alone. There is a huge shortfall between those needs and the money that is available to the local authority. Part of that shortfall will be caused by the 75 per cent. rule.

Before last year, Western Isles council was able to raise between £500,000 and £1 million through council house sales to reinvest in improving its housing stock. Last year, the 25 per cent. rule was introduced, but the new 75 per cent. rule could mean that only £140,000 will be available in the coming year.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I am listening intently to what the hon. Gentleman is saying about the 75 per cent. rule, but he will have heard what his hon. Friend said: that if he were Minister, the 75 per cent. rule would stay.

Mr. Macdonald: I listened with great interest to what my hon. Friend said. He gave me some new information and pointed out the way in which the 75 per cent. rule will impact on the public sector borrowing requirement and on taxation, forcing up housing rents and therefore public expenditure to meet the cost of those rents. He pointed out accurately and aptly that the Government simply have not thought the change through. They are hoping to save money, but it is not clear that they will save the amount that they had hoped. I fully accept that my hon. Friend will have to look at the way in which the money seems to be ending up back in the PSBR.

The Government have reduced the amount available to the Western Isles council for capital improvements by £1 million from 1 April. Taken together, the total amount available to the council for capital improvements could be as little as £1.5 million in the coming year. As recently as 1990, £4 million a year was available. In the early 1980s, it was £6 million or £7 million a year. There has been a catastrophic collapse in the amount that the Government are giving local authorities to tackle the severe housing problems that they face, particularly in rural areas.

Mr. Gallie: I listened to the hon. Gentleman the other day on the radio—he is a caring Member—when he expressed his reservations about young ladies who cannot get homes. At the same time, however, he expresses concern about capital investment in housing. I am sure that I heard him say that he did not want people on Department of Social Security benefits on Benbecula and that he wanted to knock down a number of perfectly good homes there. Will he expand on that?

Mr. Macdonald: The hon. Gentleman is completely wrong. Nobody in his right mind would want to knock down perfectly good homes. The houses to which he refers are Ministry of Defence stock. Some are perfectly good, and I would like to see them retained; others are well past any kind of repair and should be cleared away. That would be obvious to anybody who looked at those houses. I invite the hon. Gentleman to look at them if he wants to be convinced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leith made the point that, because of the Government's cuts year on year in the housing budget, we are seeing not just a housing crisis, particularly in rural areas, but a health crisis, as people's health is affected when they live in houses that are damp, draughty and not properly insulated. It is also an economic crisis, because the cuts have a direct impact on local businesses and local employment. Many small businesses, such as builders, rely heavily on the money that used to come their way through the public sector to improve and develop housing stock.

In taking the money away, the Government are hitting not just small businesses but people on low incomes, the health of the nation and the economy of Scotland, particularly the economy of places such as the western isles, where the reduction in expenditure is immediately discernible. That is why I so welcome my hon. Friend's commitment to look at housing partnerships, to release new money to reinvest in the housing programme that is much needed. I am sure that that will be the direction in which we shall go after April.

8.7 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): At least we now know that the solution to the problems of housing in Scotland lies in a windfall tax, which somehow will not affect or have any impact on Scottish Hydro-Electric or, indeed, the other Scottish power company. The truth, of course, is that it is bound to. Then, of course, there will be a "twin-track" approach. What do Labour Members think has been happening over the past few years, where we have seen the development of housing associations and the creation of Scottish Homes?

I suppose that that is—to use the language of modern times—a twin-track approach, because one is making use of the private and public sectors, working in co-operation so that there are public and private sector funds, and the two together provide the answers. The reality, however,

is that a group of people sitting in Edinburgh discussing and debating the matter will not provide answers tomorrow to the situation that many people face in Scotland.

We should consider the history of Scottish housing and ask ourselves what lessons can be learnt. The Government's proposals reflect a change of emphasis and priorities. They are applying pressure to make change happen. Sadly, we know from experience that we have to take a carrot-and-stick approach, which gives rewards for change and imposes penalties for not changing. That is what the Government have been trying to achieve in this difficult and complex area against a background of family break-up.

The family structure has changed more in the past 30 years than in the previous 300 years. There was a time not all that long ago when the family took responsibility for all its members. Much as we may like to go back to that, the reality is that we are now living in a world in which many families do not want to take responsibility for their offspring. We must deal with that problem: there is no point in saying that it does not exist, or blaming people. I believe that the blame lies with all of us.

We have created an environment in which young people, for whatever reason, want to leave home, and their parents do not care whether they do so or not. Ask any social work department whether that is a statement of fact: we know that it is. The issue is how we address that problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) provided part of the answer: it is not the entire answer. He suggested that a modern form of hostel accommodation could be provided. There is some merit in that, especially if it is run by people who care. The Salvation Army and the YMCA have a Christian ethos and a caring attitude, and perhaps there is scope for developing that area to deal with some aspects of the problem. I accept that it is not the whole answer.

Hon. Members know my views on housing benefit, which I have expressed down the years. Local authorities have deprived themselves of vast sums of money, which they could have used to carry out maintenance and repair work. The Opposition's view is not shared by Conservative Members, because our view is conditioned by experience, and we believe that if things are not working as well as they should, changes must be made.

In the past 18 years, the Government have tried to shift resources. It is tragic that thousands of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money has been put into bricks and mortar that turn out to be valueless, because the homes that have been built are unsuitable to live in. If that had been done by private investors and speculators, they would have gone broke. Homes were not built to design standards, and the quality was such that they were not built to last. Worse still, local authorities failed to maintain them.

Those of us who are on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs will remember the first visit that we made to Glasgow. We were told that there was no dampness problem. That was a joke, because we found that it existed on a massive scale. The local authority denied that there was problem.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): Nonsense.

Mr. Walker: It is on the record. What I find so disturbing is that people will not face reality. They should ask themselves what they should do to address the problem. I am not opposed to using public money to resolve social problems, but I object to using public money again and again when that has obviously failed. If we are to spend public money to build houses, there is merit in doing so in partnership, because the other partner has a vested interest in ensuring that the property is built to a reasonable standard. I am not complaining about the twin-track approach: I am merely saying that the Government are already taking that approach.

Local authorities too often supervise themselves. I do not blame the authorities for that; it is a structural weakness. We should have changed that years ago. They should not be the provider and the supervisor or inspector. A separate body should have that task, because Chinese walls do not work, as we know from bitter experience.

The Government have done more than any previous Government to address the problem of special needs housing. I am proud of what we have achieved. The present arrangements, which involve housing associations and the private sector, help to reduce the amount of money for specific grants. However, they do not reduce the amount of public money that needs to be injected into special needs housing.

Housing benefit should be seen for what it is: it is not free money, it is taxpayers' money that comes out of a separate budget. We, quite properly, criticise the Scottish National party for pretending that we can wish away the housing debt. All that we can do is transfer it to another area of public responsibility and accountability. Someone else has to pick up the tab; someone else has to pay the interest: that someone else is the taxpayer, because there is no one else to do it.

It is difficult to find rational answers. Some people see local government as one thing, central Government as another, and the taxpayer as having no direct link with either. The truth is that the taxpayer has a direct link with both, and it is the taxpayer who picks up all the bills. The Government are trying to find a mechanism for reducing local authority housing debt, which I think is a scandal, because it should never have been allowed to reach such a level. They are doing the right thing and creating the right pressure, and their carrot-and-stick approach will help. Housing benefit is the carrot. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) is wrong if he thinks that the Government have not worked that one out, because they have. That is why they are shifting resources to bring about change.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister. We face a difficult problem. I welcome the fact that the Church takes an interest in these matters. I hope that it realises that it has a part to play. In the past, the Church brought and kept people together. If anyone has failed in that area, it is the Church. Churches have not been able to persuade the populace that families should accept some of the responsibility. They have failed in that, not the politicians.

National and local politicians have failed to look at the whole canvass, because they have had vested interests in different areas. That is unfortunate, because the people who suffer are those in need, whatever their background and wherever they come from. If we are to have a caring, balanced society, we must have an appropriate housing policy. That is the Government's aim, and it is interesting that the Labour party in recent years has followed our policies.

8.19 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): In a contribution that may be largely critical of the Government, I start with a note of congratulation, or at least thanks, to the Minister for his statement that there should be continuing negotiation and discussion with Shetland Islands councils, as with the other two councils, on the commutation of the outstanding debt by the end of the forthcoming financial year, 1997–98. That will be welcomed. As I said in the Adjournment debate that I secured last month on rural housing, no matter who occupies the Treasury Bench after the next election, I trust that that will be seen through.

The less complimentary part of my speech follows. As has already been widely mentioned in the debate, we are debating a housing support grant settlement that, combined with the cuts in the funding of Scottish Homes, will lead to a substantial withdrawal of investment in Scottish housing in the year ahead, following a significant cut in investment in the present year. That takes place against a background of homelessness and poor housing conditions.

The visible signs of street homelessness indicate a reduction in housing investment. The Government introduced a Scottish rough sleepers initiative when they made their public expenditure announcement in December. We should be thankful for small mercies, but it is important to recognise what a small mercy this one is. The expenditure totals £15 million over three years and £3 million in the first year. That compares with £92 million spent in London in the first year and £270 million spent in London over the first three years. I accept that the scale of the problem is different, but, proportionately, it is not that different. It puts into context what the Government are doing in terms of the rough sleepers initiative. We welcome the fact that they have been converted to the principle of it in Scotland because it has had some results in London. The regret is that the initiative has not been better funded.

Although there are at least 1,000 young Scots, or Scots of any age, sleeping rough at night, in 1994–95, 41,500 households applied as homeless. That was a small drop on the previous year, but double what it was 10 years ago. Households translates into about 76,000 people, of whom 19,800 are children. At our constituency surgeries, most of us see at first hand the problems that can be caused by homelessness, albeit that people come to us to discuss what are essentially local government responsibilities in terms of housing. They are not necessarily people without a bed to sleep in at night. They may be in overcrowded housing or young married couples with a family still having to share with one set of parents or another. That brings considerable tension and, as I know from my own constituency experience, unhappiness and frustration.

In terms of the state of housing, 30 per cent. of Scotland's housing suffers from dampness, condensation or mould and 85,000 houses are officially below tolerable standard. The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) gave the impression that all poor housing in Scotland was in the public sector, but 77 per cent. of below tolerable standard houses are in the private sector.

Much of the below tolerable standard and damp housing in the public sector was built by private sector contractors. That does not excuse what happened, but, even if one wants to look back on history, there is a problem today: a problem of dampness, of condensation, of mould and of houses below tolerable standard. Anyone who has seen the video that last month by the Edinburgh Tenants Federation will have been made forcefully aware of the appalling conditions in which some of our fellow citizens have to live.

The reality for many people, particularly for young people, impinges so much on their lifestyle and on their education, the chances are that a child in a homeless family is regularly having to change schools, teachers and syllabuses and is unable to establish good solid friendships, which in time means that he is unlikely to reap the full benefit from his education.

A study of 1,000 primary school children in Edinburgh found that 22 per cent. of those living in damp houses were suffering from colds, compared with 11 per cent. in dry houses, so if children live in substandard housing, the chances are that they are missing more time at school because of illness. If they live in overcrowded conditions, the chances are that they will not have the opportunity of a place of quiet to pursue study.

That puts pressures on family relationships, leads to a lack of motivation and may—one would not wish to generalise because many young people manage to overcome many of these deprivations and handicaps—lead and contribute to disruptive behaviour. The Minister's comments about home-school contracts sound nice and cosy in leafy middle-class suburbs, but for a kid living in overcrowded housing with dampness and condensation, who has little motivation or is having to move around bed-and-breakfast accommodation, home-school contracts are a different thing altogether.

We have that background and a reduction in housing investment. It is estimated that in the present year investment in council housing will be a third lower than the planned level for 1996–97. On top of that, about £70 million has been cut from the Scottish Homes approved development programme. That represents a loss of new build particularly in the housing association sector, but also in the public sector and the council house sector. That means fewer roof repairs and fewer window replacements. I have already had correspondence with the Minister on representations that I received from tenants in the Grieveship scheme in Stromness in Orkney. Central heating and rewiring work was not done. Adaptations for people with disabilities will not be done.

That will impact not only on individual tenants, but many small businesses. For many construction companies, contracts for council house refurbishments are an important source of continuing work. The Minister asks, as those on the Treasury Bench often do: where will the money come from? Sixty-three jobs in the construction industry are said to follow on from £1 million worth of investment. If we reduce investment by £1 million, we are likely to lose 63 jobs, with about £500,000 worth of benefits to be paid out, not to mention the tax forgone.

In London, tuberculosis is 200 times more prevalent among homeless people than among non-homeless people, according to the national average, so today's housing cuts can be tomorrow's health service expenditure. If the Shelter estimate is that the cost of keeping a household in bed and breakfast accommodation is about £7,900 per annum, if the Median housing association rent in Scotland is £1,606, or if the average council house rent is £1,626, there could be a saving of £6,300 per household in finding permanent

accommodation. Often the problem in Government is that they consider just one narrow part of the budget, make cuts there and do not consider the consequences in terms of increased expenditure elsewhere.

It is estimated that the policy on capital receipts will have a damaging impact on the scope for investment in public sector housing in the year ahead. I was unconvinced by the proposals by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm), who seemed to be trying to wriggle out of the fact that he was not making any commitment and to find some means of dressing his proposal up. He at no point recognised an important point, which the Minister would certainly disagree with, relating to local discretion.

The Minister made great play of the fact that, if councils are going to put rents up by more than the rate of inflation, that will be a matter for them and they will then have to justify that to their tenants; but surely there is a case for local authorities to make the judgments themselves as to how much should be repaid in terms of outstanding debt from their capital receipts and how much should be invested or reinvested in their housing stock. That is an exercise of local discretion that they should justify to their local electors. If they think that the local authorities have got it wrong, the resolution of that will come at the ballot box.

A substantial amount will go out of investment in housing in Scotland this year as a result of the Government's increased capital receipt repayment requirements. Against a background of homelessness and housing quality in Scotland that leaves so much to be desired, that cannot stack up as a policy for housing in Scotland. That is why the sooner the Government go, the better it will be for housing and for the people who have suffered the consequences of poor housing and homelessness in Scotland.

8.29 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Let me begin by picking up a few points that were raised by the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), who unfortunately is not in his place. He referred to the Government's generosity in creating housing benefit to pay people's housing costs. If there were not so many millions unemployed, the housing benefit bill would not be so large, so it might be better if people had jobs instead of benefit. The hon. Gentleman alleged that home ownership would remove burdens from the taxpayer as people would no longer be council tenants. He must have forgotten about mortgage interest relief at source, which is certainly a considerable burden on the taxpayer. I do not object to it in principle, but if there is generosity to owner-occupiers, there should also be generosity to tenants.

I was surprised by the attitude of Conservative Members towards single mothers. I should point out that, by virtue of being a mother who is taking care of her child, a single mother carries the same responsibility as any other mother. It might be more appropriate to direct any critical remarks to those who may be dodging responsibility for the same children. Instead of trying to tidy people away into hostels, in might be more appropriate if Conservative Members considered that single mothers have just as great a need for housing as families with two parents. Their children have the same need for decent homes as any other children.

The Minister made no reference to the many families who live in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, where it is normal for the children to have gastro enteritis. It is absolutely shocking and must be brought to an end.

Once again, the Government paid no attention to the fact that the provision of refuges for women who suffer domestic abuse is nowhere near adequate. All those deficiencies must be addressed.

Let me refer to housing below tolerable standards. The hon. Member for Ayr referred to steady, unrelenting progress. That is simply not true as COSLA's figures demonstrate. Last year, 84,000 houses in Scotland in the public and private sector were below tolerable standards. Only 6,000 were repaired. At that rate of progress, it will be 2010 before the problem is addressed, but fortunately we shall have a new Government before long and I am certain that faster progress will be made.

The housing support grant was £213 million 18 years ago. Next year it will be only £15 million. In 1979, all authorities were eligible, now it is only a few. In the past decade, £2.4 billion of direct Government support has been removed from housing in Scotland. Local authority money was cut to put money into Scottish Homes and now its budget has been cut and the housing associations do not have the money to carry through agreed and approved projects to timetable.

On rents, I hope that the Minister will answer a particular question. Council tenants in Glasgow are alone in carrying on their rents the capital debts from other properties that they do not inhabit. The properties have been sold off to the housing associations or demolished, but the capital debt still has to be paid. Why do the tenants have to carry the cost of that capital debt? What justice or fairness is there in that? From what he said at the Scottish Grand Committee meeting in Hamilton, Michael Hirst, the chairman of the Tory party in Scotland, seemed to believe that the council tax payer paid the debt. It is high time that he caught up with reality and realised that it is carried by council tenants. Will the Minister explain why he considers that to be fair?

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Can the hon. Lady tell the House who she thinks should pay the debt?

Mrs. Fyfe: Does that mean that the Minister thinks that council tenants should have to carry the capital debt for houses that have nothing to do with them, just because they happen to be tenants? Does he think that is fair? If the Government had any sense of responsibility they would look at the matter.

Mr. Robertson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Fyfe: No, time is too short. The Government talk about controlling inflation, but they are not bothered about council tenants' rents. Scottish council rents are sky high. They have increased by 535 per cent. since 1979, compared with a general inflation rate of 162 per cent. Why should that be inflicted on people simply because they are tenants and not owner-occupiers?

The cuts in Glasgow have affected important works such as fuel saving and insulation schemes, window replacements and even help for people with disabilities. As a consequence, people's health is being affected.

[Mrs. Fyfe]

I could continue, but I know that others are waiting to speak so I shall make just one last point. Recently National Childrens Home Action for Children launched its programme for homeless youth. I had the honour to represent the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National party were also represented. There was no sign of any Conservative Member. Why could not the Tories find one man or woman in the whole of Scotland to express sympathy for homeless youth at that event?

Housing must be higher on the agenda, become a priority and get the attention that it deserves. I look forward to a Labour Government achieving that.

8.36 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) said that he had evidence that there was no damp housing in Glasgow. He must have spoken to a different council from the ones that I know as I have often raised cases in the House involving damp housing. The hon. Gentleman also said that if private sector companies built damp housing, they would not make money.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Martin: It is ridiculous for the hon. Gentleman to ask me to give way when I have so little time to speak. I have news for him. Mitchell Comus, Crudens and Wimpey all built damp, non-traditional houses in my constituency and throughout the city of Glasgow. The corridor-type houses in my constituency that attract damp were built by the private sector because a Tory Government told local authorities that they would not get housing grant unless they built non-traditional houses. Therefore, the Tory Government must carry some of the blame.

The hon. Gentleman said that the private sector would not do that. I can take him to properties that have been built by the private sector and have made companies massive profits.

Some people enjoy living in multi-storey flats. There are some extremely nice blocks in my constituency and throughout the city of Glasgow. However, those who live in other blocks feel that they have no choice. As a party of law and order, it is important to provide a concierge service in every multi-storey block throughout the country. We cannot expect police officers to take the lift up and down to patrol such dwellings. Police officers stay on the ground floor, so it is important to have a concierge system. I am glad that the Minister visited the Sighthill district in my constituency and encouraged the local authorities to establish concierge systems. It is sensible use of taxpayers' money as there has been a vast improvement in the quality of life in those blocks and the feeling of security among the tenants.

Not all tenants can leave their council houses and buy flats or houses. For domestic and other personal reasons such as short-term contracts at work, some people have to pay rents, which are far too high for those who cannot claim housing benefit. It is a shame that hon. Members do not recognise that many people fall into that category.

I shall conclude as others wish to speak. I do not agree with the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) about setting up hostels for unmarried girls. That is absolute nonsense, but I agree with him about housing improvement grants. In the last financial year, some tenants were able to get housing improvement grants for tenement buildings, but now the grants have run out. I urge the Government to review housing improvement grants.

8.39 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I realise that time is of the essence, so I shall be as brief as possible. I should tell the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) that it is interesting that his local council is talking to the Government about a commutation of debt, as that is something that the Labour party thinks cannot happen but which Governments do whenever it suits them.

The Government have made this debate almost obsolete by reducing housing support grant until it almost does not exist. Given the extent of Scotland's housing problems, I believe that the Government are pursuing the wrong policy and are going in the wrong direction. In recent years, there has been an appalling lack of investment in housing, and the escalating homelessness problem begs urgent action.

The significant aspect of this debate is that the housing support grant itself has been virtually eroded. The fact is that, 18 years ago, the grant was £213 million, with general fund contributions of another £100 million for investment. Next year, the combined total will be only £15 million. In the past decade, therefore, a staggering £2.4 billion in direct Government support has been cut from the housing budget. Between 1989 and 1996, the Government's neglect has inflicted on our budgets a 39 per cent. real-terms cut. Next year, there will be a further real-terms cut of 30 per cent.

The cuts have been aggravated by the senseless rules on debt repayment. The Secretary of State has tried to argue that they do not comprise a cut, but he is fooling no one. The rules mean that Scottish local authorities and Scottish Homes receive £193 million less than they otherwise would have received. Quite simply, given the problems that we face, that is the most severe type of cut.

The Government equally cannot wash their hands of the housing debt problem because they created it. As a direct result of their right-to-buy legislation, the number of council houses has been reduced by 31 per cent. Most of those houses were of the highest standard, but they were sold at prices that were substantially below market value. About £4 billion has been lost on right-to-buy discounts—a sum that is remarkably close to the level of housing debt. While punishing local authorities and council tenants for a debt problem caused by their policy, the Government stand guilty of allowing Scotland's housing to deteriorate further, adding to long-term and short-term problems.

The hypocrisy of the Labour party's leadership never ceases to amaze me. At the conclusion of this debate they will vote against the Government, but they have already admitted that they have nothing to offer those concerned with housing in Scotland. At the Scottish Grand Committee sitting, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) was given several opportunities to declare

that Labour would change the debt repayment rules, and his silence spoke a thousand words. Today, all we heard was some waffle about his studying the matter further. While he stalls, however, damage is being done by Tory Government policy, which gnaws away at housing provision.

Labour's defence on the matter—which is as feeble as its opposition—is that the ills of Scottish housing inflicted by 18 years of Tory rule cannot be righted in 18 months. Perhaps Labour Front Benchers would earn more sympathy from the Scottish people and from housing organisations if they had shown themselves willing to do anything. They are using Tory misrule as an excuse to do nothing.

Scotland does not need two more Tory years, and the Scottish people will not accept two more Tory years. I ask the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) to tell us whether Scotland will receive its equivalent share if, as expected, banked capital receipts are released in England. We have seen the housing policy for England. On an equivalent basis, however, will about £500 million—the appropriate sum—be released for Scotland? If not, it is yet another sign that Labour has nothing to contribute.

There must be an absolute war on shortfalls in Scottish housing. The Labour party is failing Scotland. It is giving us only more of what the Government have given us, and that will not do.

8.43 pm

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: We have had a fascinating almost 90-minute debate, and the Government have clearly set out our spending plans and priorities in a crucial sphere which affects everyone in Scotland. I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) and for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) for their support.

The principal spokesman for the Liberal Democrats spoke in the debate, and once again showed that their answer to everything is to tax, tax and tax. If we added up all their spending pledges, income tax in Scotland would be more than 30 per cent.

The Scottish National party indulged in its usual fantasy figures, pretending that £4 billion of council housing debt can somehow be magicked away in an independent Scotland and be forgotten about and cease to exist.

The spectacle, however, was provided by the principal Opposition party, the Labour party. Today it promised not one extra penny for housing in Scotland and confirmed that 75 per cent. debt repayment would stick. Whereas I had support from my hon. Friends on the Government Back Benches, not one Opposition Back Bencher supported the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson)—*[Interruption.]*

The hon. Member for Hamilton should not sit there chuntering away, because he was not in the Chamber for the debate and did not hear a word that was said in it. He does not know what the hon. Members for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) or for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) were saying or how they were criticising him—*[Interruption.]* I do not know where he was, but he cannot sit there and chunter away about what was said in the debate, because he was not here. He may well have had a very valid reason not to be in the House. That is fine, and I understand it. However, he should not pretend to understand that he knew what happened, because he does not.

We have clearly set out our spending priorities in housing across Scotland. I commend the order to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 293, Noes 246.

Division No. 88] **[8.44 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*

Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and Mr. Matthew Carrington.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chapman, James *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dixon, Rt Hon Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*

Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'ld)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Ms Angela Eagle.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 22nd January, be approved.

Orders of the Day

Welsh Development Agency Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Order for Third Reading read.

8.58 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House will be aware of the provisions of the Bill, the purpose of which is to amend section 18 of the Welsh Development Agency Act 1975 to raise the financial limit of the agency from its present level of £950 million to £1,350 million. The Bill is a routine, technical measure to permit on-going public expenditure to finance the agency's activities without prejudice to future spending decisions.

I was asked in Committee how long the proposed increase of £400 million would last. The annual amounts that contribute to the limit are derived from a series of activities that have to be based on the best assumptions at the time, including the total that can be afforded for the agency's programmes, the estimate for total capital and current receipts, the likely level of repayments and the permitted level of the budget for running costs. On top of that would be any supplementary provision that could be made in-year. It is really not possible to state with any certainty how long increases in the agency's financial limit are likely to last, and I would not wish to pre-empt future public expenditure decisions either generally or specifically.

In Committee, the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) asked me to provide the total figure for 1997–98 and 1998-99 that will count against the agency's financial limit. I have written to him and a copy of the letter has been placed in the Library. Approximately £62 million is planned to count against the agency's financial limit in 1997–98 and about £101 million in 1998–99. Those figures should be taken as only indicative figures for the purpose of debate, and they are liable to change.

I was pleased to be able to respond to the wishes of members of the Committee in another respect—for the sums counting against the agency's financial limit at the end of each financial year to be reported more widely. Members of the Committee will already be aware that the agency's annual report, a copy of which is laid before Parliament, carries a statement of the agency's expenditure to date counting against its financial limit. I have, however, agreed that the Welsh Office's departmental report should also include figures showing the agency's progress against its financial limit, starting with the 1997 departmental report.

9 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): In some ways, I regret that it looks as if this Bill will be the last of the Welsh Development Agency Bills because of its provision that such matters will in future be dealt with by statutory instrument and in a debate of an hour and a half. I regret that because, even during the passage of this Bill, we have probed and discovered aspects of the agency's expenditure, budgets and future targets, which are of interest and concern to us all.

[Mr. Ted Rowlands]

The most important fact is that there is a Bill at all and that, after 18 years, a Welsh Development Agency has survived. Those of us who recall the heyday of early Thatcherism—in which any form of government intervention was denied entirely and it was thought that everything should be left to the market and the money supply—will be fascinated by the agency's experience over the past 18 years. There was supposed to be no fine-tuning of the economy, but the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England now fine-tune on a monthly basis.

The most extraordinary and interesting development of the agency, which has been spending very large sums of public money—I support that expenditure—has been in ensuring the location of major inward investment. By any standards, it represents regional, development area policy of the kind that goes back to post-war Britain. It is strange that, considering everything else that has been said ideologically over the past 18 years, the agency has been fulfilling a rather traditional, long-standing function. Indeed, it has gone beyond that.

I found the Secretary of State's speech on Second Reading fascinating for the way in which it seemed to counter the concept of non-intervention. We have not only intervention, but clear, specific prescriptive targets for the agency to achieve. We have got down not only to the number of jobs that we expect the agency either to create or secure but to sub-regional targets, which I very much welcome.

I should like to remind the House that, on Thursday, the Secretary of State said:

"I shall require that at least 50 per cent. of the jobs safeguarded or created by the agency to be outside the eastern M4 and A55 corridors."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 1997; Vol. 291, c. 461.]

So far, it has been argued that development has favoured the south-east and the north-east. Such planning is prescriptive. We are saying to the agency, "Thou shalt put 50 per cent. of all jobs and the expenditure that goes with them in certain specific areas in the Principality." Although I support that—the Secretary of State's announcement was widely welcomed—I think that it produces an interesting concept of detailed prescriptive targets which I thought were inconsistent with high Thatcherism.

As we have targets and the Secretary of State made the case for them on Second Reading, we should be enlightened on the definition of the sub-region about which we are talking. What is the eastern M4? At which junction does it become the western M4?

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Bridgend.

Mr. Rowlands: Perhaps the Minister can confirm that.

We should also have a definition of the M4 corridor. How wide is it? I am fascinated by the prescriptive targeting that has emerged from the Secretary of State's thinking, but we need closer definitions.

Now that the discussion of detailed, prescriptive targets has started, I would like to propose some more targets. I shall direct my remarks to my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench, because I hope that they will soon establish with the Welsh Development Agency targets for the next few years. However, my remarks may be valid during the Secretary of State's few remaining weeks of tenure. If targeting is now in fashion, we should ask the agency to reach other targets.

First, I would like one target to be restored. We used to have a specific target for the reclamation of derelict land by 2000. That clearly defined target has been pushed aside, but I hope that my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench will consider restoring it. In the debate last Thursday and in our debates on the Bill, concerns emerged that, whatever success the agency has achieved, with LG and Halla Engineering, the Welsh still have the lowest disposable personal income in the United Kingdom and the lowest gross domestic product per capita. Therefore, I see no reason why a future Secretary of State should not seek to establish targets to improve those figures by a certain date.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): That is Stalinism.

Mr. Rowlands: I am merely describing targets like those that the Secretary of State has suggested. If we can have geographical targets, we can ask the agency to achieve economic targets.

The Welsh economy differs from those of most other regions and nations in the United Kingdom in another respect. Everybody says that future development in the world economy will come from small and medium companies, not larger ones. All the figures that I have seen show that Wales has a low proportion of small and medium companies, especially in manufacturing. The UK figure for companies with under 200 employees is 45 per cent., but the Welsh figure is 32 per cent. Small and medium companies therefore play a smaller role in the Welsh manufacturing economy. A significant target would be the promotion and development of small and medium manufacturing companies as a future base for the Welsh economy. That might also be an important Welsh Development Agency target.

I was fascinated by the new concept of prescriptive targeting by a Tory Secretary of State. I can imagine the howls of protest that would have come from Opposition Members if a Labour Secretary of State had talked about such targets—they would have called it old socialist planning—yet a Tory Secretary of State is targeting and planning, even in a sub-regional fashion, as much as any previous Government.

I welcome the Government's conversion to those concepts, because I still support those concepts. I believe in the role and function of Governments. I represent a community that is living proof that government matters, because when Governments did nothing we suffered; I believe passionately in targets and in government, and therefore in the role that the agency can play.

I have identified one or two of the targets that a future Labour Government could adopt. In describing them, I may also have revealed the daunting legacy that we shall face when we come to power within the next couple of months.

9.10 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am glad to take part in the debate, albeit late in the passage of the Bill. I have had an interest in Welsh Development Agency legislation from its earliest days. My only regret is that

the Secretary of State is not with us on Third Reading, to accept our felicitations on today's news that, even though he may not be able to find a seat or be elected in Wales, he has found a future wife there. I am sure that we all congratulate him on that.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) went back to the days in 1975 when the original Bill was debated. There was total opposition from Conservative Members to the creation of the agency: they were against it, lock, stock and barrel, because it would be interventionist and might affect the workings of the free market economy.

One of the Conservative party's wiser acts after coming to office was to realise that one does not throw the baby out with the bath water, and that the WDA had the potential to do a great deal of good for Wales. The Welsh Development Agency may not have had the resources that the Bill will give it, and may not always have had the guidelines that we would consider necessary for it to make an impact on the Welsh economy; none the less, it has been an extremely important body and has a future role that may be even more significant.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney spoke about targeting. I, too, was interested in the fact that the previous target allowed up to 80 per cent. of the new jobs that were coming to Wales to be concentrated in two small corners, the south-east and the north-east, which represent 10 per cent. of the land area of Wales and include about 30 per cent. of the unemployed.

Now the position is that 50 per cent. of the jobs will exist within 90 per cent. of the land area, and 50 per cent. will be in an area with 70 per cent. of the unemployed. That is a move in the right direction, but it does not solve the problem. Furthermore, the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney was right to ask about the definition of the two areas. Is it to remain the same, and on what basis has it been reached? It is not a statutory basis, and this has not been defined formally at all.

We gather that the boundary runs along the M4, from the border with England as far as Bridgend, and that, in the north, Alyn and Deeside and Wrexham are included, but not Prestatyn. If those are the limits, presumably areas that are crying out for new jobs, such as the Cynon valley, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda in the south, or Point of Ayr and Prestatyn, which are in the north-east but need the jobs, will miss out on the 50 per cent. that are available.

How will the Government ensure that jobs come beyond the defined area, to places that need them, such as Dyfed in the west—in the south-west, in Pembrokeshire, there have been areas of high unemployment for many years—Ammanford and the Amman valley further east, and Holyhead and parts of the old Gwynedd in the north-west?

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I intervene to try to assist the hon. Gentleman and, I hope, the House. For the purpose of the WDA's strategic guidance and targets, the eastern M4 is defined as the coastal strip from Chepstow in the east to Pyle in the west. The northern boundary is coincident with the southern boundary of the programme for the valleys area, extended east to include the southern half of Monmouthshire. In north Wales, the eastern A55 corridor is defined as the non-rural part of the Wrexham county borough council area, the whole of Flintshire and the northern part of Denbighshire, including the towns of St. Asaph, Rhyl and Prestatyn. I have had a map of the eastern M4 and A55 corridors placed in the Library.

Mr. Wigley: I am grateful for that helpful intervention. There has been a small change from the map used by the WDA previously, and that underlines the need for these matters to be defined so we know exactly where we stand.

Assuming that we have clearly defined areas, the other question that arises—which is even more relevant to the Bill—is, "How will the resources to be made available by the legislation be used to achieve the Government's objective?" The objective, as described by the Secretary of State for Wales the other day, was that there would be a mechanism to enable those areas further to the west—perhaps the old coalfield areas in the industrial south of Wales or the western side of Dyfed or Gwynedd—to receive resources to make up for their difficulties in attracting industry.

I should be glad if the Minister will tell us how the money to be provided by the Bill will be used. What will be the mechanism? What will be the constraints? Will it be possible to use those resources as the Secretary of State suggested? It is not good enough to give generalities. The areas with full development area status, intermediate status and no benefit at all are defined in legislation, and the resources have been fairly tightly defined. If, by virtue of the Secretary of State's statement, it will be possible to have more resources per job in the areas of the west without development area status to make up for the loss that they would otherwise experience and to enable them to compete on an even footing with areas with full development area status, that is significant. Presumably, that statement has been cleared with the European Union, because questions of competition clearly arise.

I hope that the Minister can give a categorical assurance that the mechanisms have been cleared and defined and will be available to make sure that every location trying to get reasonable development—Dyfed, Gwynned, the western parts of Glamorgan, the old coalfields, Neath and the Rhondda and Cynon valley areas, all of which have had high unemployment in the past—will have adequate incentives to attract industry which would otherwise take the easy option and locate in the south-east or north-east corridor of the M4. If the Government cannot give a statement along those lines, it will be a question for an incoming Government after the general election. We know that those areas need to be targeted, but that is not happening.

I turn briefly to another matter raised by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney—the balance of priorities in using resources. There is a balance between money going to inward investment into Wales and the need for investment in companies that are already located in Wales. Small and medium companies often need the same helping hand, but they undoubtedly feel that they miss out. In my part of Wales, small companies say that one has to be a big Japanese or Korean company to get help from the WDA.

The WDA is not interested in small companies. That may not be a fair reflection on the WDA, and I understand the importance of the 6,000 jobs that come with projects such as LG; I do not disparage that. However, if they grow, our small acorns can be valuable contributors to the economy. They have the advantage of being scattered

[Mr. Wigley]

around Wales so that they benefit several areas and, as they are rooted in Wales, they are unlikely to decide to pack up at the first ill wind of economic depression. We must ensure that there is an equal balance in using the resources that the Bill provides to help small indigenous companies in a way to which perhaps not enough attention has been given in the past.

My final question concerns the Opposition spokesmen rather than the Government. How will oversight of the WDA's use of its funds, the balance between investment in large companies from outside and small companies, and the geographical distribution of the resources available, be handled under the elected assembly that Labour is committed to introducing? Will it be done by absorbing the WDA, and the resources that go with it under the Bill, in the apparatus of government under the assembly? Will there be an arm's-length relationship or will it be done by the present quango state? I suppose, hope and suspect that there will be a change, but it would be helpful to know. In using resources, which I assume will be available to the Welsh Assembly in due course, it is important that we have accountability and the fine tuning of policy necessary to meet the requirements of unemployed people in every part of Wales.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney was right. Wales is at the bottom of the league table of gross domestic product per head of all the countries and regions of Britain, not including Northern Ireland. That respects a decline from 92 per cent. of GDP per head a generation ago to only 83 per cent. now. That does not reflect well on the success of Government policies in recent years. I hope that we will get not only the resources given by the Bill but a dynamic commitment to rejecting unemployment as a factor in the economy and ensuring full employment in every part of Wales, and a determination by virtue of that to raise the income per head of the people of Wales to an acceptable level. That is the background against which we should see the Bill. If it plays such a part, it will be helpful; if it does not, the same areas will suffer for decades to come.

9.22 pm

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): I shall be brief because I want to touch on matters already mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). On Second Reading, the Secretary of State discussed setting targets to increase the performance of the WDA in areas outside the narrow confines of the M4 corridor and the eastern end of the A55 corridor. He gave a commitment to increase the target for creating and securing jobs outside those areas from the present 20 per cent. not merely to the 32 per cent. that he claimed that the WDA was already achieving, but to 50 per cent. I welcome that.

My constituency has the second highest unemployment level of any travel-to-work area, not only in mainland Britain but in Northern Ireland. Only Cumnock and Sanquhar has higher unemployment than south Pembrokeshire. It is interesting that the third worst area is also in the western periphery of Wales: the Holyhead travel-to-work area. I welcome anything that targets resources to achieve a significant increase in the number of jobs secured or created in those areas.

As the hon. Member for Caernarfon said, as well as setting targets, the Secretary of State gave a commitment on how the resources would be used to achieve those targets. He said:

"Secondly, I am asking the WDA, within agreed UK and European limits, to recognise the extra costs of locating in some areas by providing more assistance to companies locating in those areas than to equivalent projects elsewhere."—[*Official Report*, 10 February 1997; Vol. 290, c. 80.]

I ask the Under-Secretary to confirm tonight how that aim would be achieved.

Would a company that located in the constituency of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris)—which, given the boundaries that the Minister announced a few moments ago, would be eligible for additional resources—receive the same per capita funding as a company that located in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies)? Would it receive the same grant as a company locating in my constituency, which is some 70 miles further west? Would there be a gradation of assistance as the companies located further afield? The same question applies on the north Wales coast, towards Ynys Môn.

The Under-Secretary owes us an explanation. We agree with and welcome the targets, but how will they be achieved? The Secretary of State said that different grants would be offered. Is he saying that, the more peripheral one gets, the more grant one receives? I should welcome that idea, as I have the most peripheral constituency. The Under-Secretary must make it perfectly clear how the targets will be achieved.

If the grants are not graduated in that way, constituencies with the worst unemployment problems and the worst structural long-term unemployment—such as my constituency and Ynys Môn, and particularly the two travel-to-work areas of Holyhead and south Pembrokeshire—will think that the Government's rhetoric is meaningless. We need specific, additional help. If there is no true gradation, and a job in Port Talbot, Aberavon or Holyhead receives the same grant aid as one in Pembroke Dock or Wrexham, there will be no great incentive for any new investment in the far west. Labour Front Benchers will also have to decide how to tackle the structural problems of the peripheral areas in the far west. I welcome the Minister's comments on that matter.

After the statement on 10 February, my local newspaper carried a front-page story saying that help was on the way. I told the reporter to be careful: I warned that Christmas had not arrived early and that we needed to see the details. I fear that, despite the WDA's best intentions in trying to push significant inward investment further west and the fact that investment may improve along the M4 or the A55 corridors, unless it has the resources to achieve that aim, the areas with the highest unemployment will not see the major investment that is required to address their structural problems.

9.29 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Like the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), I offer my felicitations to the Secretary of State on his engagement. I am sorry that he is not here to receive those felicitations, but perhaps it is because he was a bit shy of receiving them that he decided to absent himself.

I understand that the *Western Mail* was in two minds as to whether to run the headline this morning, "Offa's Tyke Joins Welsh Establishment", but decided against it for good reasons. We shall watch carefully to see whether the Welsh Development Agency decides to invest in some Welsh gold mines now, if the Secretary of State orders an especially large engagement ring for his new fiancée.

I shall now discuss the Bill, and especially the issues that have arisen tonight, on how one resolves the differences between what has emerged of the Secretary of State's promises, as to how he will distribute WDA resources differently geographically. That subject was highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) in the annual Welsh affairs debate—the St. David's day debate, as we sometimes call it—last week, on 27 February 1997 at column 462. He drew attention to the attempt to push investment and new job creation preferentially westward, and to some extent northward, by creating what one might loosely call a Mason-Dixon line. South-east Wales would have a lower priority than south-west Wales, the former having received the benefits of LG and certain other recent investments—Ocean Technical Glass, Newport Wafer-Fab and so on—and now that, perhaps more modestly, north-east Wales has received the benefits of the expansion of JCB, Hoya Lens and so on, investment would be pushed further west along the A55.

The problem is that, to do that, one must know whether sufficient resources are available to make it possible. Although the Bill extends the WDA's parliamentary financial limit by £400 million, if, as is likely, the Bill is passed—we shall not oppose it—the issue will remain of how much of those resources is left uncommitted, with which to execute the new policy of pushing investment further north and west. What is the point of issuing a ringing declaration about directing new WDA investment preferentially to areas that have not benefited very much in the past couple of years, if there are no resources to do so?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) has asked the Minister to tell us how much of the WDA's budget is uncommitted as things stand: uncommitted in this case meaning, I believe, on a commonsense basis—uncommitted to the known projects, in other words, to LG, Newport Wafer-Fab, JCB, Halla Fork-Lift Trucks, the expansion of Sony in Bridgend or any other investments that have been announced.

The Secretary of State is making a grand pronouncement about his intention to bias the agency's operations so as to push job creation further west: further into the valleys, further west into north Wales and west Wales, and into Pembrokeshire because of its unique difficulties following the problems of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, the Sea Empress disaster, defence cuts and the oil refinery closure, but how can that be done if all the resources have been fully committed? We have not yet received an answer to the question that was posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East in column 462 in last week's annual debate on Welsh affairs. That question has arisen repeatedly during tonight's Third Reading debate.

What resources are available to the Welsh Development Agency, via the Bill, the public expenditure survey process and so on, with which to carry out the commitment given by the Secretary of State to execute the grand new policy to try to develop the whole of Wales, not merely the south-east and north-east corner?

The WDA has the problem, not only of existing commitments, but of how the Welsh Office wants to define its relationship with the agency. In other words, does the Welsh Office see the WDA as an organisationally autonomous body, within the constraints of Treasury approval, approval from the Secretary of State and parliamentary debate once every five years, such as this debate? Does the Welsh Office envisage that within the normal constraints of parliamentary approval, the WDA should have a reasonable degree of operational autonomy, or should it work on the basis that every time it lands a big fish such as LG, it should go back to the Department for approval to spend the money? The Department would then give it a special handout, as happened last autumn in the winter supplementary estimate, and would say to the WDA, "Obviously, you have landed a big fish. You cannot handle that within your cash flow. Here is another £25 million, and a further £20 million for the next financial year."

That was never the original intention for the relationship between the Welsh Office and the WDA. In the past few years, the amount of finance given by the Welsh Office to the WDA has gone up and down like a yo-yo. The agency was virtually crippled by the previous Secretary of State and the forced asset sales policy, which took away the cash flow, its operational autonomy and its ability to handle all but the largest projects within its annual budget. Once the agency lost the cash flow from its rental income on buildings and land, it did not have operational autonomy.

We need to know from the Minister tonight whether it is now Government policy in the few remaining weeks of this Government to try to make the WDA totally dependent on the Welsh Office, so that every time it has a need for expenditure approved by the Welsh Office, it will ask the Welsh Office to give it some money from the general pool, as happened with the extra £25 million. I am sure that the Minister recalls that in Committee my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) asked him where the extra £25 million that was awarded to the WDA last November came from. The Minister replied, "Within the usual flexibilities."

Is that the sort of relationship that the Welsh Office wants to have with the WDA? Does it want the WDA to ask the Department every time it wants to spend some money, rather than being operationally autonomous during the financial year, except in emergencies? "Within the usual flexibilities" is not sufficient to define the relationship between the Welsh Office and the WDA in the future.

Many speakers have referred to the problem of getting the balance right in Wales in terms of new job creation. Has south-east Wales, in particular, done almost too well for its own good, and is it straining the labour supply and the supply of specialist skills, such as those of engineers?

I saw a letter in the *Western Mail* that referred to the possible emergence of an almost continuous urban strip of a possibly undesirable kind, running roughly from Cardiff Wales airport, to the west of Barry, right through Cardiff, through Newport and on to the end of the steelworks at Llanwern. That was described as a newly emerging city called Bacardiport—made up of Barry, Cardiff and

[Mr. Rhodri Morgan]

Newport—giving the right yuppie image of people sipping sundowners while looking at their boat from their luxury pad, and so on.

That illustrates the danger of areas of Wales having prosperity levels that we usually associate with the south-east of England, while the rest of Wales would be left to fend for itself as dormitory areas or areas that remained dependent on welfare, and so on. We need to know more from the Government about how they intend to achieve the right east-west, north-south, valleys-coast balance in the work of the WDA.

Finally, I shall deal with the sums that the Government will make available via the Bill and its financial provisions. In Committee, at columns 12, 16 and 19, I guessed that under the terms of the Bill, using the Bill's definition of finance for the WDA, the WDA would require about £100 million in the year 1998–99.

The Minister did not want to answer in Committee, which is fair enough. We then received a letter stating that my figure was wrong, and that the sum was £102 million. I received a letter on 25 February stating that the figure would be £202 million, but that letter was withdrawn.

Given the excitement generated in the ministerial private office by all the talk of engagement and marriage, it may be natural and forgivable to make a few mistakes, but it looks as if the figure of £100 million was about right—within £1 million or £2 million of the correct figure. That means that, having given an additional £400 million to the WDA in terms of the financial limit, or having permitted that expenditure, we would be doing the same job again in about four years' time.

The Government have said that they will attempt to give us the indicative limits. We are not talking about fixed commitments, but the amount will be about £100 million in 1998–99, which means, obviously, that £400 million will be used up in four years. If, as the Minister said, the limit is only indicative, I do not see why he could not go a step further and say—as it was not a commitment—that the Government expected the £400 million to last for so many years.

It would be useful for everyone in Wales to know the Government's policy on the WDA. Its financing, and its dependence on the Welsh Office, should not be allowed to go up and down like a yo-yo. We have lived through that over the past few years: we have lived through a very serious situation. The previous Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), tried to wreck the WDA by forcing it to dispose of all its major saleable assets. He lowered the amount of finance required in the terms of the Bill to only £13 million in 1994–95. The present Secretary of State started off in the same mould, keeping finance to less than £20 million, until he found an extra £25 million last November. He is now rebuilding the agency, but he is doing so with post-dated cheques. It is important for us to be given a much clearer picture.

As for the WDA's financing of the Eurofreight terminal project between Cardiff and Newport, no money appears to be going in. The WDA has been asked to look after the terminal on behalf of the Secretary of State, but what is it actually doing? Consultants commissioned to act on behalf of the Secretary of State, but under the WDA's aegis, have reopened the whole issue of whether the terminal ought to be between Cardiff and Newport or between Newport and the Severn bridge, or on Cardiff docks, or on the site of the existing freightliner terminal at Pengam moors.

That question was closed off by the Secretary of State, but the consultants for the WDA have said that they are reopening the issue, and that they are considering four sites rather than one. Is that because the Secretary of State has told the WDA to put off the decision? Has he said, "We have no money to fund the grant for the Eurofreight terminal anyway, so please delay this until after the election"? The Government are undoubtedly living in a post-dated cheque culture.

We want to know how the Mason-Dixon line is defined. We also want to know when the Secretary of State and his ministerial team expect Wales to move up from the bottom of the prosperity league table. We have plans to remove not only the democratic deficit but the prosperity deficit from Wales, by putting the WDA and its resources directly at the behest of the Welsh people, through the Welsh Assembly.

9.43 pm

Mr. Gwilym Jones: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to respond to as many of the questions that have been raised as I can in the short time that is left. First, let me thank the hon. Members for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) and for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) for their kind congratulations on the engagement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I hope that the House will accept that it is understandable that, for once, he has not been in the Chamber for the entire debate.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, West was concerned about the flexibility that—not unusually—we used to find more money for the Welsh Development Agency in-year. That was a result of end-year flexibility entitlements carried forward from previous years, a switch of resources from class XIV, vote 1, claims proving lower than expected for agri-environmental and farm conservation schemes, and cases of funds within vote 2. I am grateful to him for his forbearance on the difference between £101 million and £202 million. He gave one explanation. Perhaps it was merely nothing more than wishful thinking.

The hon. Gentleman asked about time limits. Since the debate in Committee, I have checked that, and I note that the current limit will probably last for about six years, whereas the previous limit lasted for three years. We feel that the limit proposed in the Bill is more than appropriate.

I am glad that the hon. Members for Caernarfon and for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) have given me an opportunity to respond to their concern—it is one we hear elsewhere in Wales—about indigenous companies.

As the hon. Member for Caernarfon said, one complaint we hear is, "You have to be a big Japanese or Korean company to receive help from the Welsh Development Agency". He will know, as will every hon. Member, that that is certainly not the case. It is Government policy, and it is the WDA's intention, to ensure that help is available to every company that can appropriately be provided for, be it an indigenous company or an inward investor coming into Wales.

A new target will be to focus attention for support for indigenous companies to go hand in hand with support for inward investors. The agency is required to secure additional business worth £24 million through its business development activities. Within the target of 12,500 jobs in total, 8,000 should come from inward investment, of which some 3,000 should be new jobs from overseas. Linked with the inward investment jobs target is the requirement to secure some £400 million in associated planned investment. The target for investment from all the agency's programmes is £600 million.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney also expressed concern about the opportunities for the debate in future, and suggested that only one and a half hours would be allowed. I have checked this, and one and a half hours should probably be regarded as the minimum for debate. It would be possible to have longer debates—subject, of course, to the Speaker.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to land reclamation. The aim of removing all major or significant dereliction in Wales by the end of the century was promoted by the agency some time ago. However, circumstances change, priorities are reviewed, and new projects come forward. Other factors can affect progress. For example, the full complexity of some schemes becomes apparent only after work has commenced. The target of removing all major dereliction by the end of the century was the agency's target, and not one reached by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) made a fascinating proposal about a gradation westward through Wales, from which he would very much have been the greatest beneficiary. I wonder whether he would invite even more trouble from his more easterly colleagues in trying to pursue that objective. We have told the WDA that it will have to act within agreed United Kingdom and European limits, but that we want it to recognise the extra costs to companies of locating in some areas by giving them more assistance than it gives equivalent projects elsewhere.

That matter is best taken forward by the WDA determining what it would recognise in the circumstances. I wish to encourage the hon. Gentleman not to be as overly negative on behalf of his constituency as he implies.

Mr. Ainger: What the Minister just said confirms again that it is far more difficult to locate businesses the further west one goes. There are higher costs and so on. He is again implying that there may well be a gradation in grant aid. Is it possible under the present restrictions to offer different levels of grant aid, using whatever criteria, between an area such as Pembroke and areas such as Llanelli or Aberavon?

Mr. Jones: That is a matter for the agency to consider. We have said that we want it to consider the extra costs involved—no more, no less. That is the best thing for it to take forward.

Mr. Rowlands: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Wigley *rose—*

Mr. Jones: I give way to the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney.

Mr. Rowlands: The most important and significant assistance is selective financial assistance. Will that reflect the geographical problems as well?

Mr. Jones: I want the agency to use all the weapons at its disposal, so that it can be effective. We now place great emphasis on the western corridors in north and south Wales.

Mr. Wigley: I want to develop that point. Will the agency make grant aid available? By and large, it has given loan aid. Many of the companies that are not in the regions with full development area status cannot obtain grants. Will there be a change either in the maps under the Industry Acts or in the definition of the WDA's powers to give grants as well as loans?

Mr. Jones: I am not going to invent legislation on the hoof, because we have stated our intention. We want the agency to recognise the extra costs involved in locating in north-west and west Wales. I am confident that the agency will achieve its targets, because it already has an excellent record on job creation in western and north-western parts of Wales.

Mr. Morgan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: I wanted to refer to the hon. Gentleman's point about LG and the dependence of the Welsh Development Agency.

Mr. Morgan: I just want to ask the Minister to respond to my point about what my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) said last Thursday. On the question of how much uncommitted budget the WDA will have to execute under the new policy of pushing investment further west and north, the Secretary of State said:

"The WDA has many commitments, but that does not mean that its entire budget is committed."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 1997; Vol. 291, c. 462.]

If its entire budget is not committed, how large is the uncommitted section?

Mr. Jones: I do not have that answer at my fingertips, but I shall be pleased to write to the hon. Gentleman to give him more information.

The hon. Gentleman expressed concern about whether the Welsh Development Agency would be totally dependent on the Welsh Office should something similar to the LG project be developed in the future. No, that is not my expectation. I expect the agency to continue to be a totally integrated part of the successful "team Wales" approach that we have taken, and which we will continue to take after the general election with even more success, without the extra bureaucratic costs and hurdles with which the hon. Gentleman would saddle Wales.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

Ordered,

That Sir Archibald Hamilton be discharged from the Standards and Privileges Committee and Sir David Mitchell be added to the Committee.—[*Mr. McLoughlin.*]

PETITIONS

Scottish Borders Council (Financial Settlement)

9.53 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): On behalf of my constituents, I wish to present a petition, which has attracted more than 7,500 signatures of people in the Scottish Borders region. Never in my three decades in the House have I known such genuine anxiety about the quality of public services in our region, and that is reflected in the response to this petition.

The second part of the petition, which pleads for the capping limit to be raised, has already been agreed by the Secretary of State for Scotland since the petition was drawn up, and we are grateful for small mercies. However, the main burden of the petition remains, as the Scottish Borders council will meet later this week to carry out the unpalatable task of cutting what people regard as essential services. The petition reads:

The petition of the residents of Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale constituency in the Scottish Borders declares that the financial settlement proposed for the Scottish Borders council for 1997–98 is inadequate to meet local needs and will lead to damaging reductions in the level of public services. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Scotland to review the settlement proposed for Scottish Borders council for the aforementioned year, and also urges the Secretary of State to revise the maximum capping limits imposed on the council for 1997–98.

I have pleasure in presenting the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

9.53 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I seek the leave of the House to lodge the Roxburgh and Berwickshire part of the regional petition that has been organised, explained and presented to the House by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel).

The first name in the Roxburgh and Berwickshire petition is that of 12-year-old Ross Oliver of Hillend drive in Hawick, who came to our meeting in Galashiels, and, in front of 600 people, explained that he hoped to be a professional swimmer when he was older, but could not do so if the local authority's proposed pool closures went ahead.

That petition and sentiment is also supported by Mr. Ronald Young, an athlete with learning difficulties who has won many medals, including a gold at the 1991 special Olympics. He too is worried about the closure of the Jedburgh pool, which will be proposed by Scottish Borders council at its meeting later this week. The petition reads:

The petitioners of Roxburgh and Berwickshire concur with the plea that has been made by the Members from Roxburgh and Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale that the petitioners request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Scotland to review the settlement proposed for Scottish Borders Council for the aforementioned year and also urges the Secretary of State to revise the maximum capping limits imposed on the Council 1997/1998.

I beg to submit the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Railway Safety

9.55 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): The petition that I wish to present carries 4,200 signatures, many of them from my constituents in Preston and others from other residents of Lancashire and Cumbria. It draws attention to a new hazard faced by rail passengers. Whereas passengers were previously endangered by inadequate door locks on trains, now they face the problem of being inadvertently locked in prematurely, which can cause acute and hazardous distress to certain passengers and has triggered at least one death by heart attack. The petition reads:

To the House of Commons.

The humble Petition of the citizens of Cumbria and Lancashire declares that—Many people, including the old, infirm and disabled, as well as young people, have been "overcarried" from Oxenholme (Lake District) and other railway stations, due to the central locking of the doors and the very short stopping times of the trains. This has been aggravated by the fines imposed by Railtrack on the train companies for late running.

This "overcarrying" is traumatic and dangerous.

These fines are putting pressure on the railway staff who should be able to check that all passengers who wish to get off the train have done so.

The Petitioners respectfully ask the House of Commons to cause these changes to be made in the procedures on the country's railways, in the interests of passenger safety.

Simple on-train notices and audible announcements, with two-way radio for guards and conductors to communicate to enable the doors to be re-opened when necessary . . . the abolition of the fines levied by Railtrack.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

I beg to submit the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Road Traffic (Nottingham)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

9.57 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I am grateful to have been granted this Adjournment debate about road traffic issues in Wilford, Nottingham. I do so because in many ways they seem to represent a microcosm of the transport clashes of interest that we would find in almost every major urban area. I do so also with some sadness, because this debate follows an extremely successful public meeting, at which it came out that many reasonable complaints, which appear to have been made over many years, have been completely unresolved or are still being disregarded by the Highways Agency, at which they were initially directed.

I want to break the issues down into two parts: internal transport and traffic movement on the estate, and the broader issue of trunk road traffic movements that affect the edge of that part of Wilford in Nottingham.

To take local issues first, there are clashes of interest between drivers, pedestrians and cyclists. The interests of vehicle traffic collide with environmental interests, public safety interests and public spending priorities. In some circumstances, the word "collision" is sadly appropriate and involves people colliding with vehicles. In others, it results in the victims of those clashes affecting other aspects of the problem, the most obvious being children travelling to and from school.

Many children on the estate have to travel along Wilford lane or Ruddington lane to reach the local secondary school. Most parents no longer allow their children to cycle to school.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Mr. Simpson: It is worth noting that, 20 or 25 years ago, eight out of 10 children would have travelled to the secondary school by bike. Today, however, one, or at most two, out of every 10 children cycle to school. It is not that they are uninterested in exercise or in travelling by a more responsible means; they and their parents know that far greater risks are associated with travelling to school by bike. Cyclists in Britain are 10 times more likely to be involved in a road accident than cyclists—adults and children—in Germany, for example, because we have forced vulnerable road users on to the same narrow roads on which the main and overriding priority always seems to be the car.

As a result, parents driving their children to school add to the other risks and the traffic congestion on the estate, not because they wish to do so, but because there are few safer alternatives on which they can rely to protect their children's health and well-being.

The accident statistics, particularly on Ruddington lane, make a sufficient case for recognising that it is a serious problem. In 1993, the county council conducted a survey of road traffic schemes. It found that more than 50 per cent. of cars on Ruddington lane were travelling at more than 35 mph and one in six cars were travelling at more than 45 mph—this in a 30 mph zone with a secondary school right on the main road. The police and local authorities recognise that in no way could that be described as safe and sensible driving.

Between 1991 and 1996, there were two fatalities and six serious accidents. In addition, there have been numerous witnessed incidents in which people have narrowly escaped serious injury. One would have thought that there were grounds for local authority action. Neither the police nor the local authority has expressed indifference to the plight of local people in respect of traffic problems, but they have drawn attention to two problems: insufficient cash resources to do anything and the complexity of the rules, which appear to exclude far more possibilities than they include.

For example, this year we asked for two initiatives to be taken, one involving traffic-calming measures on Ruddington lane and the other involving a pedestrian phase in the traffic lights at the junction of Ruddington lane and Wilford lane. Our first thought was that it could be paid for out of the transport supplementary grant, but the council pointed out that all the money had been allocated to what was referred to as the "Greater Nottingham (package bid) area" and that capital funds for minor schemes would therefore be devoted to areas outside the city boundary.

We therefore examined what would be available from the Greater Nottingham package funding programme. However, it was made clear that that funding was available only for the strategic road network. As neither Wilford lane nor Ruddington lane is part of the strategic road network, funding from the package was not applicable to the problems faced by people in the Wilford area.

We then thought that it might be appropriate to pursue the matter in another context—under supplementary credit approvals, which the Government make available for their local safety scheme. However, that approach also drew a blank. In a letter, the county council stated:

"The Highway authority has the ability to bid for monies for traffic calming schemes . . . However the funding does not come in the form of grant but as part of Supplementary Credit Approvals . . . The Department of Transport's Guidelines on this matter are quite clear—'The resources earmarked must be used to deal with locations where there have been recurrent accidents in the last three years, which can be reduced by engineering measures. They are not intended for sites where there appears only to be a risk of accidents'."

The dilemma—the Catch-22 or strike three position in which Wilford residents were caught—is that, although statistical evidence on accidents is available, it is not sufficient for the previous three-year period to trigger entitlement to the supplementary credit approval schemes.

There is ample evidence of accidents that were averted or of near-misses, yet we have the absurd position in which we have to wait for serious and predictable accidents to occur before money is triggered so that we can prevent them from recurring. We are essentially looking for people who will volunteer themselves or a member of their family to be seriously injured so that we can protect the rest of the community. I really cannot understand the logic of such a situation.

In policing practice over the past few years, the police have quite rightly said that crime prevention is better than crime detection; that, although stolen items may be recovered, people never properly recover from the effects

[Mr. Simpson]

of being burgled; and that it is better to implement measures to prevent burglaries from occurring. The same logic should apply to accidents. It is better to avoid accidents by design rather than waiting for them to happen and then introducing policies to clear up the mess, yet "prevention" is clearly not the framework within which the current rules were made.

It seems that only minute obligations are built into the ways in which moneys are passed to local authorities to ensure public safety. There are more rules to exclude one from entitlement than to include one. Moreover, access to those funds is triggered by accidents or by death rather than by calculations of avoidance. It would be helpful if the Minister would re-examine the rules to determine whether we can find a more sensible starting point.

In trunk road policies, the problems faced by Wilford residents have been seriously compounded by the improvements to the A52—Nottingham's ring road—which is a major conduit for traffic coming into and going around the city. No one disputes the importance of the ring road, although whether the improvements were done in a manner that minimised disturbance to local people is another matter. Those complications have added to local residents' frustrations. Local people believe that the Highways Agency has pursued an almost bizarre twist of logic in assessing noise impact and their compensation entitlements.

The effects of improvements on that part of the trunk road system have been enormous, and have been particularly bad for the residents of Bradbourne avenue, in Wilford. I am particularly indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Mason, who have fought not only their own cause but that of many others who have to deal with very high levels of noise and air pollution shrouding every aspect of their daily lives. It has turned the urban dreams of many into urban nightmares.

Residents have to face unacceptably high levels of noise every day. As if that were not bad enough, the worse news is that the noise levels are set only to increase. The Minister will know that a base noise level of 68 dB is needed to trigger noise compensation, together with a 1 dB increase in noise levels expected during the following 15 years and resulting directly from the improvements to the trunk road system.

The noise level assessments in 1994 for properties on Bradbourne avenue, Newholme drive and Barnfield were, respectively, 70.4 dB, 76.3 dB and 77.5 dB. That is before the additional calculations for the growth of noise impact in the 15 years ahead. Those noise levels qualify the properties to get over the first hurdle, but not the second, of a 1 dB increase. After enormous difficulty, we obtained answers from the Highways Agency about the calculations that it used for that assessment: all come just under the 1 dB increase.

Some of the ways in which those figures have been arrived at leave me bemused. It is worth looking into the difficulties that the Highways Agency puts in the path of people who are trying to find out the basis of the calculations. The Highways Agency says that it has used the low growth estimates for traffic growth and noise growth. I know of no trunk road improvement that has failed to hit the high growth levels that were feared. The success of a trunk road improvement can be measured partly by how rapidly the additional road space is filled up. That has been the compelling argument for further trunk road improvements. Whether that is a sensible choice is a separate matter, but to assume that only the low growth figures will apply is absurd. The high growth figures would bring about a 2 dB increase in noise levels, which would automatically entitle a greater number of people thus affected to compensation in the form of noise insulation to their properties and environmental improvements in the area.

I have been able to raise the matter only as a result of doing a huge amount of work and putting great pressure on the Highways Agency to get the information. Local people were not able to get the information despite their persistent, reasonable and courteous inquiries to the Highways Agency. One of the strongest criticisms about the culture in the Highways Agency is that it appears to run on a premise of coned-off thinking that excludes the public from access to legitimate information about plans for future road improvements and any assessment of their impact.

The Highways Agency also appears to run on an Alice in Wonderland use of words—that words will mean no more than it chooses. First, it told local residents that there had been no road widening. During our negotiations and exchanges, however, it was accepted that there had been road widening. The agency cannot say that the incorporation of what was previously the hard shoulder into the main carriageway is other than an extension of that carriageway. It has not altered the parameters of the road, but it has increased the size of the carriageway quite significantly.

There has also been a recognition that road widening has occurred on a 40 m stretch of road very close to the Bradbourne avenue part of the Wilford estate. In addition, alterations to the Clifton underpass immediately in front of the estate have added an extra lane to the A52 and the trunk road going out—on the A453—towards the motorway. An extra lane of trunk road traffic is now part and parcel of the intersection that touches the edge of the estate.

My concerns about how the matter has been managed go through a series of fairly simple stages. As I read the law and regulations governing the matter, it became clear that the Highways Agency ought to have conducted an impact assessment on all properties within 300 m of the end of the trunk road improvement. Clearly, that has not happened. If one draws a line showing a 300 m radius, it becomes clear that a tranche of properties on the Wilford estate was never included in any impact assessment. In that sense, the Highways Agency failed to carry out the statutory duty imposed on it by the House and by Ministers' regulations. That failure has denied residents in that part of the Wilford estate information from the assessment that they should have had at the start of the scheme. Even the current findings are still inaccessible to people, because of the way in which the calculations were made; yet the way in which the agency has tried to say that there have been no significant alterations to the trunk road is bizarre.

I should like to raise with the Minister the notion that the agency may also be pursuing a way of avoiding compensation by making improvements by increments. Let me explain how this works.

If the Minister and I bought properties at the end of a long stretch of road and over 15 years the traffic on that road increased, it might be unreasonable for either of us to claim compensation for such natural growth on a road that was there when we arrived. I would probably think that it would be presumptuous of us to lodge such a complaint. If, however, back down the road, the improvements that have taken place on the A52 had occurred, I think that both the Minister and I would be a bit miffed.

First, a major underpass at the Queens Medical Centre and university intersection reduced congestion and enabled traffic on the A52 to flow much more quickly, effectively and in greater volume. The next significant stage of the improvement was the Dunkirk flyover, which was supposed to speed up traffic flow, reduce congestion and increase traffic volumes, and has done so fairly successfully. The third part of the improvement was to add an extra lane to the Clifton underpass. That has speeded up traffic flow and provided an extra lane on the southbound carriageway, which separates traffic at an earlier stage so that two lanes of traffic can still join the ring road and two can swing round out towards the motorway.

All the improvements have been fairly successful, but if the Minister and I owned properties just beyond the end of them, I suspect that we would both argue that each of the improvements materially affected the traffic flow past our properties. It would not matter whether the pavements or whatever in front of our properties had been tinkered with; all the improvements in the tranche of road that preceded our properties would significantly change the nature of the road.

That is precisely what has happened to the residents in Wilford and in part of the constituency of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the continuation of the A52. However, the Highways Agency tried to argue that all those improvements should be ignored because they happened at earlier stages. It said that earlier increments could be written off and that calculations of impact should not carry through.

In addition to the natural traffic growth, there has been serious growth by design and construction on the A52. There has been growth in volume, speed and noise. I do not argue against that, but the effect of those changes on the environment in which people live should be acknowledged. It should also be reflected in compensation.

The Highways Agency is supposed to advertise to invite claims by those who have suffered from noise intrusion or loss of value. The agency chose to advertise in two free newspapers and one other newspaper that circulates only at the other end of the city. If people in Nottingham were asked which was their local newspaper, 99 out of 100 would say that it was the *Nottingham Evening Post*; yet that was the one newspaper in which the Highways Agency chose not to advertise. It is hard to escape the common conclusion that that was a strategic choice to deter claims for compensation rather than encourage them.

The budget for environmental repair forms only a minute part of the multi-million pound cost of today's trunk road improvement schemes. I ask the Minister for his assurance that he will consider several key points about strengthening this element.

Will the Minister consider raising the status of non-motorists' interests in road scheme budgets? Could a designated minimum of 5 per cent. of the budgets be earmarked for environmental repair and improvement? Could local authorities determine the placing of compensation advertisements? Will the Minister investigate the Highway Agency's negligence and its failure to undertake the statutory impact calculations for the Wilford area? Will he review the use of incrementalism as a way of avoiding compensation claims? Will he also make a commitment to a shift in emphasis—to public protection rather than budget protection—in the trunk road improvement programme, and to recognise the reality of the impact of high growth on people's lives?

It would be a real help too if, within the guidelines for the appropriate local government budgets, commitments were made to prioritise public safety over faster traffic; to allow integrated budgets that would facilitate sensible movement of moneys towards identifiable priorities; and to place a duty on local authorities to ensure that public safety and environmental protection are the preconditions of road improvements rather than their first victims. If the Minister could make those commitments, he would be thanked not only by the people of Wilford but by people throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.

10.22 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I shall consider carefully the points that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) made at the end of his speech, and I will send him a more considered response than I can achieve off the cuff this evening. We try to build environmental features into all major trunk road schemes in mitigation of their effects. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman does not believe that we have succeeded in the scheme that he mentions.

I shall start with trunk roads. Of course, the hon. Gentleman is more familiar with the ones that he mentioned than I am, but I acknowledge that the traffic flows on those trunk roads have grown strongly in recent years. The A52 at present carries a daily flow of some 44,000 vehicles on the section to the south of the A453 junction, and the section to the north of the Clifton bridge is used by up to 76,000 vehicles each day.

The A52 to the north of the river crossing has recently been widened from a dual two-lane road to give three lanes in each direction. The Clifton bridge has been reconfigured to give four lanes in each direction. That work was completed in March 1995 and the extra capacity has been welcomed by road users in Nottingham but, as the hon. Gentleman explained, not so enthusiastically by those who live near it.

Major maintenance has also been carried out on the road both north and south of the river crossing. Through Wilford, the reconstruction has raised the level of the road by up to 8 in. Existing noise fences were therefore renewed and set at higher levels to compensate for the change in the height of the carriageway.

Those works to the A52 have brought entitlement to compensation under the terms of the Land Compensation Act 1973, for the effects of increased traffic noise and other nuisance. I shall certainly investigate what the hon. Gentleman said about the way in which entitlement to compensation was advertised. It is generally our practice

[Mr. John Watts]

both to advertise and to cover such matters in a press notice, so that it can be reported as a news item. I shall investigate whether that was done in this case.

Claims are still being lodged by local residents and so far more than 300 have been received, two thirds of which have been processed. The total paid in compensation to date is about £17,000, and the average payment per successful claim is around £550. Compensation is set independently by the district valuer with recourse to the lands tribunal in the event of an unresolved disagreement.

The Noise Insulation Regulations 1975 cover the provision of offers for noise insulation necessitated by new or altered roads. The hon. Gentleman referred to some difficulties in agreeing a definition of improvements that fall within that compass, but I hope that the matter has been resolved satisfactorily.

The works carried out on the A52 did not bring any statutory entitlement to noise insulation. The hon. Gentleman explained the reason: the increase in noise fell short of the 1dB required. Only one property was insulated: a restaurant to the north of the river. That insulation was offered because of the expected high levels of noise during the carrying out of the works rather than because of the effect of the road in use.

There is discretionary power to offer noise insulation, but the Highways Agency does not make offers where the expected increase in noise is low, as is forecast in this case, even though the absolute level of noise is already high. I am aware that the hon. Gentleman has taken up many of the detailed issues about the calculations with the chief executive of the Highways Agency and that that correspondence is continuing. If it does not come to a successful conclusion, he can revert to me on that matter, too.

The agency does not try to withhold information about how the calculations are done, but I, as a non-technical person, have sometimes found its explanations extremely difficult to follow. It is certainly the case that a layman, as I consider myself to be in this instance, cannot really understand the calculations unless he has an expert to monitor and validate what is being explained.

The Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport announced on 5 February their decision to approve the A453 Clifton lane improvement, following consideration of the inspector's report into the public inquiry. The scheme has a long history that the hon. Gentleman knows, and I am aware that he has not supported it. It has, however, been approved through the full democratic processes and it is still our view that it offers the most sustainable and economically robust solution to the trunk road problem.

It is obviously for the county council and, after April this year, for the city council as a new unitary authority, to manage the non-trunk network. As the hon. Gentleman said, a package bid for Greater Nottingham was first accepted by the Department in December 1994. It remains one of the most successfully supported packages within shire authorities, with £1.3 million of supplementary credit approvals allocated in the current year, and we are happy to continue that level of support into 1997–98.

Within the package, the local authority has considerable flexibility about which elements it progresses. The proposals include park and ride schemes, bus priority measures, traffic calming and cycling and pedestrian schemes. From what the hon. Gentleman said, I gain the impression that he felt that the authority—

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 5 March 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Hospitals (Northern Ireland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I appreciate the opportunity provided by this Adjournment debate to focus on hospital provision in Northern Ireland. Many of my colleagues wish to catch your eye, Madam Speaker, and you will be as relieved as the Minister to learn that I do not intend to prevent him from having reasonable time to respond.

Everyone in Northern Ireland can expect to use the hospital services available to us at some time or other. We are all concerned to maintain the excellence of our hospital provision. In 1998, the national health service in Northern Ireland will be 50 years old. It came into being under a Unionist Government, which was committed in the post-war era to the improvement of social welfare. My colleagues and I welcome the commitment given by the Government to increase expenditure on the health of the nation year on year, and would welcome a similar announcement from the Opposition to ensure appropriate future funding levels for Northern Ireland.

It should be recognised that Northern Ireland has special problems as one of the least well-off regions of the United Kingdom with specific regional problems, such as an unusually high rate of heart disease and a high number of patients suffering from cancer. Those problems should be borne in mind when funding decisions are made.

The cash crisis and the inadequacy of present funding of the health service in Northern Ireland received a positive response from the Minister exactly a week ago when Ulster's cash-hit health service received additional funding of £5.2 million to be shared among the four health boards to help them buy a range of elective services. Some of the patients, who have been waiting too long for operations, will now receive long-awaited surgery, but waiting lists are still too large and patients have to wait too long for the problem to be resolved by piecemeal funding in response to all-party representation or press and media attention directed at the Department of Health and the Minister.

We welcome the Minister's response, but I hope that he will acknowledge that Members of Parliament who represent Northern Ireland constituencies have been pressed forcefully by their constituents, who are enraged to learn that surgery was on offer and was being sold to patients in the Republic of Ireland while British citizens who have paid taxes and national insurance were left on waiting lists because health authorities and fundholders could not pay for the operations to which their patients were entitled. Many are afraid to be named lest they suffer further delay. My colleagues and I want to see such future funding as is necessary to eliminate unreasonable waiting times for any patients in Northern Ireland. When the waiting lists have been cleared, nobody would object to the expert services still available being sold on to relieve the suffering of patients from outside Northern Ireland.

Further evidence of crisis in hospital provision was highlighted in the *Belfast Telegraph* on 6 February. The article, which was entitled "Cancer unit in crisis", highlighted the threat that existed for Northern Ireland cancer patients at the Province's regional cancer centre because of the overwork and maximum use being made of the special diagnostic simulator machine at Belvoir Park. It is the only one of its kind in the Province and had had problems earlier this year. There were genuine fears of a more serious breakdown that would have delayed urgently needed diagnosis and treatment.

Cancer patients and their families throughout Northern Ireland are deeply grateful to the anonymous donor whose generous gift of £400,000 will provide a new diagnostic simulator. We all appreciate the fact that its £250,000 installation costs have been made available by the Department of Health, which has been shamed into finding that money by the generosity of the anonymous donor. The investment could save lives, because earlier diagnosis and treatment will become available when the second simulator is in use.

The perception of a growing crisis in our health and social services provision in Northern Ireland has been expressed by patients, medical practitioners, trade unionists, and by the Royal College of Nursing, the largest professional working group in the NHS. The public at large want to see the nurses in our hospitals and those who are employed elsewhere in the health service properly rewarded for their care and devotion, without long-drawn-out pay negotiations.

My constituents in East Antrim are dismayed because no improvement was made to the A8 from Larne to Ballynure, before Moyle hospital at Larne was closed. No improvements to the road have been made since the hospital closed, either. Are any improvements even being considered, either now or in the future, to make access to the Antrim hospital faster and safer for motorists and ambulances travelling from the Larne borough area?

What assurance can the Minister give that congestion on the A2 between Carrickfergus and Belfast will be relieved in the not too distant future? Again, that would provide faster and safer access for my constituents in Islandmagee, Whitehead, Carrickfergus, Greenisland and Newtownabbey to the Whiteabbey and Belfast hospitals. Can the Minister assure me that he will continue to support the retention and upgrading of the existing services at Whiteabbey hospital in my constituency, which must not be run down in order to fund the failure to rationalise hospital provision in Belfast?

The most recent figures for admissions to Northern Ireland hospitals, published in columns *443-44* of *Hansard* on 18 November 1996, show how long patients had waited for admission. It should be of concern to all of us that although by March 1996 progress had been made to clear up most of the backlog of patients who had waited more than two years, 800 patients had still waited longer than 18 months at that time.

[Mr. Roy Beggs]

Can the Minister report significant progress over the past year in reducing the number of patients who have been on waiting lists for more than 18 months? Is the inability of health boards and fundholders to pay for operations creating another backlog of non-urgent operations for the future? Is the failure to fund the number of operations that our hospitals are capable of carrying out part of a deliberate strategy designed to reduce the number of acute hospitals in Northern Ireland?

Can the Minister assure us that patients who do not wish to be placed in mixed-sex wards will have their wishes respected, and will be allowed to retain their dignity and their right to privacy in single-sex wards?

Will the Minister, together with representatives of the Northern Ireland ambulance service and the hospital trusts that serve my constituents and others, set aside some time on a regular basis to discuss matters with the chief executives, and to examine for himself examples of the appalling incidents that have occurred and keep occurring, causing distress and suffering to young and elderly patients alike?

The Minister would not normally have sight of those horror stories, because in such cases my colleagues and I now write to the chief executives of the appropriate bodies, but a debate such as this affords us the opportunity to raise them in the Chamber.

Why should a pensioner who fell and broke her thighbone on Friday night have to lie in agony on a hospital bed until Monday before being transferred to Belfast city hospital for treatment? Are there no proper facilities for treating patients, whether pensioners or not, at weekends? There was a good final outcome to the case, and the patient made a good recovery.

Is not the following story a disgraceful example of the falling level of provision in our health service? An 80-year-old woman suffering from an acute kidney infection was, on her doctor's advice, conveyed by emergency ambulance to hospital at 4.24 in the afternoon. She was accompanied by her husband, and was wearing a coat and slippers but no stockings. She was discharged at 5.40 and informed that there was no ambulance to take her home.

The patient and her husband, who was also 80, waited while a nurse tried to contact a relative, but gave up and set off on their own. There was no taxi rank in the vicinity of the hospital, and they walked a considerable distance on a freezing cold night to a railway station where they waited for an hour to make part of their journey by train, and then found a taxi in which to complete the journey on that wintry night, arriving home two and a half hours after the woman had been discharged from hospital.

Last year, a man took his six-year-old grandson, who had broken his arm, to Antrim hospital. The waiting time for an X-ray was an hour, after which he was advised that the staff present could not set the child's arm and the grandfather would have to take him to the Royal Victoria hospital.

Unfortunately, six or seven weeks ago, the same man's eight-year-old grandson had to be taken from Larne to the Antrim hospital, where, after an X-ray, a fractured ankle was diagnosed. Again, there was no one present to set the child's ankle and the grandfather had to drive to the Royal Victoria hospital.

I hope that the Minister will take time to examine those cases and that, even though there were apologies and excuses, he will ensure that there is no repetition of such incidents.

Not everything in Northern Ireland is gloom and doom, however. I am sure that the Minister will join me in congratulating Londonderry-born Dr. Peter O'Hare and Gill Elliot from Belfast—two Ulster scientists whose recent breakthrough has been hailed as one of the most important in gene therapy, and a major step on the way to combating several diseases, including cancer.

I hope that there will be close collaboration between those involved in cancer research at Queen's university Belfast, the new state-of-the-art cancer research unit of the Ulster Cancer Foundation at Belfast city hospital, and the Marie Curie research institute in Surrey, where the characteristics of the mystery protein VP22 were discovered for the first time.

Will the Minister robustly seek from the Government financial support to take forward that valuable work, and avoid placing further and increasing burdens on charities and fund-raisers that are already competing with the national lottery?

We have the expertise in Northern Ireland to have the best hospital services in the United Kingdom, or the world for that matter. That can be achieved only by increased funding, better use of resources, savings on administration and adequate community care funding for those discharged after a short time in acute hospitals. I urge the Minister, on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland, to seek that funding from Government.

9.49 am

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) on securing this debate. It is unfortunate that the debate coincides with what will probably be the last plenary session of the inter-party talks in Northern Ireland before the pre-election recess; that explains why hon. Members from other Northern Ireland parties are not present. One of the advantages of having a somewhat larger party is that we have greater depth of resources and can afford to be in two places at one time.

We must bear in mind some general points about hospital provision. I hope that the Minister agrees that the Government have an obligation to deliver to the people of Northern Ireland the same quality of health care as is available elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and agrees that, because of our differing circumstances, to achieve that may require more expenditure in Northern Ireland than elsewhere.

I regret to say that Northern Ireland has, generally speaking, a much less healthy population than the average English region—that problem is not confined to Northern Ireland: there are regional differences elsewhere as well—and the difference will have to be reflected in the services provided.

Northern Ireland has a lower density of population, so one cannot say that it needs the same provision as a region in southern England with a population of 1.6 million. Our greater geographical area and sparser population impose additional burdens on services, and an apparently higher level of provision will be needed to obtain the same level of service. One will also have to take account of the nature

of the road network. Our roads vary in quality, and my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim referred to some of the difficulties that his constituents encounter as a result.

Those general points will have to be borne in mind when we consider what appears to be the Department's fundamental strategy, which is to close comparatively small hospitals in order to concentrate on half a dozen acute hospitals to provide for the health needs of the whole of Northern Ireland. Does the Minister believe that that is the right strategy and that it takes account of the particular needs of the people of Northern Ireland—or is it driven by the needs and desires of administrators and consultants? That is a fundamental question.

We must also ask whether the policy of closing the comparatively small hospitals is a good thing in itself. When the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) was Secretary of State for Wales, he discovered that there were no significant financial savings in that policy and he reversed it in Wales. Those hospitals should be able to deliver a service. There is no reason why centres serving populations of 20,000 or so should not be able to sustain a certain level of provision.

The closures involve not only significant transitional costs but a significant loss in terms of recent investment. The Minister will know that my concern relates largely to the situation in Banbridge and the recent closure of its hospital. One of the disadvantages of that decision is that the investment in surgical wards a few years ago has largely been written off.

The way in which policy has been implemented in Northern Ireland recently seems to me to involve significant waste and to ignore the geographical realities, which do not always coincide with trust boundaries. Banbridge hospital was part of the Craigavon area hospital trust and a satellite to the main hospital.

The Minister has decided that Craigavon area hospital will have to provide for the need that would otherwise have been provided for at Banbridge, but that does not always take account of the geography. It is not all that easy or convenient to travel from Banbridge to Craigavon; the roads on that route are less convenient than the major dual carriageway that runs roughly north to south from Newry to Lisburn and Belfast.

Consequently, the closure at Banbridge does not assist the hospital trust and is likely to involve a transfer of resources out of the area. The nature of the road network also creates problems in the provision of an ambulance service. When the hospital is withdrawn from Banbridge there will obviously be a greater need for a better ambulance service. One need not labour the point that speed is crucial in terms of people's prospects, especially in the case of heart attacks, for example. The necessary speed of response is simply not provided in Banbridge, and especially the rural part.

We get assurances from the trust that ambulances are available and response times adequate, but we hear far too many stories from constituents who have had to wait a long time for ambulances. I am not satisfied that the reports from Ministers and administrators give us a correct and accurate picture of the situation. There is a general lack of confidence in the ambulance provision in the Banbridge area, and that needs to be addressed seriously.

The Minister will know of the alternatives proposed by Banbridge council, which has tried to be realistic. It would much prefer the hospital to be kept open, but it has been prepared seriously to consider other ways of delivering a good service, through developing what is referred to as a polyclinic or community hospital. That would build on the present out-patient services and try to provide as much of the service that people need as close to them as possible.

I am glad to see the Minister nodding in agreement, but unfortunately the only promise that I am aware of his having made so far is simply to continue the existing out-patient services. I hope that he will go much further than that.

Banbridge presented proposals for a polyclinic to the Department some time ago, but what response has been made and what action taken? No clear decision has emerged, and instead we shall have further delay as a result of the decision to explore the possibilities of the private finance initiative. I appreciate the fact that the Minister is working with financial problems, and that PFI is sometimes regarded as a way round those, but it means a further delay.

Bringing in PFI could delay provision by a further two years and that is not satisfactory. Many people regard its introduction with distaste because they see it as a roundabout way of transferring the advantages of the site, its development potential, and the profit that will come from it, to the private sector.

As for the strategy that is supposed to underlie the Department's approach in the maintaining of six acute hospitals, I fear that what is happening to health provision in my area will undermine the service. As I said earlier, it is unlikely that, following the closure of Banbridge hospital, all the patients will travel to Craigavon. Given the geography of the area, there is a strong possibility that many will go to Daisy Hill, Lagan Valley or even Belfast—for the prospects of Daisy Hill and Lagan Valley are not completely unclouded. Some resources will be transferred from Banbridge to other hospital trusts. Craigavon needs the finance that comes from Banbridge; it cannot cope with the present situation. I am worried that the future of Craigavon area hospital may be undermined.

As was said earlier, the primary concern now seems to be the convenience of consultants and administrators rather than the needs of patients. Moreover, there is an overall lack of finance. The present Minister may not be able to remedy that, but it is a serious problem. Despite what was said by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, there has not been an overall increase in resources for the health service in Northern Ireland, although substantial additional resources have been made available in England and Wales. Indeed, the Government's current expenditure plans show significant real increases for England and Wales as a whole, while Northern Ireland's total block grant for the current financial year shows a decrease of 0.5 per cent. in real terms. That is not a large figure, but it is a decrease in real terms. There are also problems relating to allocation within the block, and other problems arising from that.

Were it not for the pressure exerted by my hon. Friends, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), we would not have had the desperately needed extra injections of finance that we have had in recent weeks, but we need more. There should

[Mr. David Trimble]

be a fresh look at financial provision for health in Northern Ireland, so that we obtain the service that we require. It must be acknowledged that, because of the geographical and health factors that I have mentioned, Northern Ireland needs more expenditure than England and Wales.

10.2 am

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the debate on health issues. My hon. Friends have dealt, to a large extent, with individual examples—specific constituency issues—but they have also touched on principles. My hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) referred to the PFI. I believe that some large firms in Northern Ireland would find the task that they have been asked to undertake too small for their own capacity, in terms of the time taken up by consultation and planning and the lack of any attempt to press ahead with major issues. I am thinking of firms such as Mivan in south Antrim. I wonder whether we have sufficiently thought out the issues involved in some of the schemes that are considered in Northern Ireland.

I echo the tribute paid by my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) to the dedicated skill of those who provide our health service. We must bear it in mind that some of the problems that we are experiencing arise from the tremendous success of that service. For instance, people who had cardiac surgery 10 or 14 years ago are now returning for more, and the same applies to those who have had orthopaedic operations in the past. After years of useful, healthy life, those people now find that they need further surgery. I do not want to minimise the work that has been done, and I feel that the entrepreneurial and inventive skills involved should be recognised.

Having said that, I must add that, as the Minister will know from his own figures, informed observers are criticising the lack of spending on Northern Ireland's health care. The quality of the service was at its peak in 1992. The Minister can heave a sigh of relief: he was not responsible for such matters then, and cannot be held responsible for the whole downturn which has followed. Let me ask him, however, about the split in the spend in the top slicing. How much do the Department and the health management executive keep to cover overall demand? How much, for example, has been spent on independent consultants? How much time has been taken up? Who, in that sense, manages? There seem to be many different fingers in the pot.

Are we looking for a real remedy for the problems of hospital provision, or just a repair job to tide us over? There is a tendency to employ more consultancy and management staff, rather than introduce better technology. I have been interested in the issue of medical records for some years, and I believe that one of the difficulties in the past has been the fact that consultants have been blamed for not bringing patients in when, in fact, the medical records were at fault. Given that £1 million may have to be spent to provide a hospital building, or part of a building, to house medical records, would not a good computer be cheaper, take up less space and provide the answers much faster? I raise that point because it has been brought to my attention.

I understand that schedule 3 to the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 reserves powers for the Department, which may determine whether it might be impractical to negotiate or contract for certain services. How often has it done that? Is it true, for example, that the Eastern health and social services board pays 23 per cent., compared with the average of 50 per cent. paid by health authorities in Great Britain? Is there a proper spread of finances?

The other night, I was thinking about a cause celebre—a missionary strategy in an African country years ago. Excellent nurses were sent out to that country, but within a year each returned broken. Finally, the council of the sending body decided to look at what was happening on the ground, and realised that there was a senior nurse there who should have been dispatched long since.

Are we dispatching the right people? The Ulster hospital has lost two chairmen and one chief executive. Is it a fact that in 1995 its trust board asked for permission to do consultancy work so that it could get to the heart of what was happening in the hospital and that that permission was given only in 1996, a year later? Why did it take so long if there was obviously a problem?

On contracting, was the Ulster hospital unique or was the problem reflected throughout the Province? Contracts for 1995-96 were not worked out until November-December 1995. Even for this year, 1996-97, it was June before they were finalised. Is that not one of the reasons why there has been a backlog, which has caused problems? Did not the Royal Victoria hospital have vacancies and provide services outwith Northern Ireland?

I do not criticise any hospital in Northern Ireland for providing services for people outwith Northern Ireland, in Great Britain or, for that matter, in the Republic, provided that the money follows the patient. However, with better contracting, would it not have been possible to deal with the GP fundholders who claim that they sought to get patients treated in the Royal but were told that there was no provision? Marginal costs—or was it done at full cost?—were provided for patients from the Republic. As far as I can remember, 900 cardiac operations in the Royal should be done at full cost, leaving about 300 at marginal cost. Would it not have been better, when it was realised that there was demand, to have averaged that out better? Does the Minister want to intervene?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss) *indicated dissent.*

Rev. Martin Smyth: It would have been better to average things out so that both fundholders and boards pay the same price, rather than playing with purchasers. We must remember that the Royal is the only provider of cardiac surgery in Northern Ireland. Would it not have been a better use of resources to use the full potential complement? Is it not also a fact that the University hospital of Wales produced a report on the Ulster hospital? That was certainly requested by the trust, but it was commissioned by the Department. Should there not have been consultations involving the trust concerned, the Department and the Minister before final decisions were taken?

I have had a letter from the Minister—as I am sure other hon. Members have—advising me of the changes that are taking place and of the amalgamation of the

Ulster, North Down and Ards Hospitals health and social services trust. Are there any grounds for hope that the confidence expressed in the letter will be borne out? Given that the management executive was not previously prepared to put in a better team of management and support the trust board, is there any likelihood that changes will occur now?

I come to a question in which the Minister will appreciate I have a deep interest, as one who has supported the long-delayed rationalisation of the Royal and Belfast City trusts. Plans were on the drawing board at least 30 years, if not 50 years, ago. The City has sketches of what was planned. There was an imaginative idea for a tunnel to connect the City and the Royal to ensure the best use of resources. For various reasons, that has been dropped, but the Department rightly decided to go ahead again, and there have been three studies. Each hospital would automatically lose some of its provision, but, as they are 10 minutes away from each other, I do not believe that that is an insuperable problem.

A charter of excellence was granted to the City casualty and emergency unit, but it is to close. I understand why the Royal should be retained; it has the neurosurgical unit and it should be the regional trauma centre for Northern Ireland. I have no difficulty with that, but why the delay in going ahead with something that I believe rationally minded people will understand? I equally understand that sectional interests will be involved, but surely the McKenna report was clear about the provision of maternity services at the City. Does the Minister accept that there will be a drag on the health trust if the facilities and plant that are available in the wards in the tower block are not used purposefully? One has only to bear in mind the concept of return on capital to understand what I mean.

I cannot accept the arguments that are presented for the Royal site. It is true that the money needed immediately to improve the Royal's maternity buildings would be marginally less than would be required for adaptation of the tower site. However, a few years down the road, the cry will go up that we need new maternity provision on the Royal site when we already have facilities on the City site.

Cardiac specialists and others tell us that they must be situated conveniently close to the maternity hospital. What happens in Southampton, which has a fine medical school and fine cardiac provision? Women there are often sent to the community hospital at Basingstoke to have their babies. That is not 10 minutes down the road. Some of the arguments for having everything on the Royal site are false.

I must now speak specifically as the Member for Belfast, South. In considering the arguments about employment prospects in west Belfast, I remind the Minister that the Mater Infirmorum hospital is in north Belfast and that a fair number of people travel from west Belfast to have their children there. North-west Belfast will have two sets of maternity provision. We will lose the centre of excellence that has been at the City hospital for years. This year, some 2,700 to 2,800 children were born in the City, which has excellent facilities. I urge the Minister to remove the indecision that has so often been a hindrance. I sympathise with Ministers who have to make such decisions, because the clamouring voices come from all angles. However, I ask the Minister to remember that south Belfast has higher female unemployment than any other part of Northern Ireland.

I understand that the Belfast City Hospital health and social services trust has asked for clear guidance on whether there has been unfair discrimination. One can have fair discrimination: sometimes we have to decide what we are going to do, and discrimination means making a judgment. However, there can be unfair discrimination. For example, the public dividend capital required in the first year was reclaimed by the Department from the City trust in the second year of operation, but not from the Royal Group of Hospitals and Dental Hospitals health and social services trust. The City trust paid £1.4 million more in dividend for the year 1994–95 than did the Royal group. As I understand it, the Royal was a trust first. There are issues that have to be faced. Hon. Members have local interests, but we still want the excellent regional services, to which reference has been made, to be retained in the Royal hospitals and the Belfast City to serve all of Northern Ireland. There are specific times when we must decide where some of those services are to be sited.

10.19 am

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): This is an important debate. We are asking the Minister where we are trying to go with hospital provision in Northern Ireland. It has a long history related to advances in medical science and to the geographical location of hospitals. In the old days, single-handed consultants were willing to do everything whereas now a massive team is needed to do anything. Sometimes one wonders whether all the changes that have been made were as wise as they might have been.

Enormous advances have been made in medical science. There have also been tremendous changes in transportation, with the improved road network and all the rest of it. There has been a quantum leap in doctors' expectations of the conditions in which they have to operate. Above all, there has been a tremendous centralising influence on hospital provision in Northern Ireland, driven mainly by the medical profession and advances in medical skills. The concept of providing a certain number of acute hospitals on specified sites has been with us for many years. I do not disagree with it. We need a range of hospital provision. However, we appreciate that, for rare and difficult conditions requiring heart surgery or neurosurgery, we shall only ever have a regional service based in Belfast.

The truth is that someone living within 10 or 15 miles of Belfast will receive a much better service than someone living in Enniskillen or Londonderry, because of the travel times and distances involved. It is financially and practically impossible to provide specialist skills in every corner of the Province. That is a problem not only for Northern Ireland but for the rest of the United Kingdom.

In Belfast city, there is a high concentration of hospital beds and expertise. There are many hospitals within a few minutes, travel of each other. That is not the situation elsewhere. Coming from the Six, I have to say that many decisions have to be made, some of which have never been properly made. One of those hard decisions revolves around north Belfast, which, as we all know, is protected by Act of Parliament. It is pretty well impossible to do

[Mr. William Ross]

anything with it, so I suspect that it will be a rock in the torrent of change for ever. It is a decision with which the Minister will have an enormous number of difficulties, whoever sits in his hot seat down the coming years after the general election. Hospital provision in Belfast has a domino effect on the location of acute hospitals in Northern Ireland. We cannot continue dodging the difficulties for ever.

Huge sums have been spent on acute hospitals in Northern Ireland over the years. I have here the somewhat dated Northern Ireland expenditure plans, published a year ago; it is rather a pity that we do not have the up-to-date version for the debate. The plans show that expenditure has been set aside of £10 million on the Royal Belfast hospital for sick children, £9 million on remedial works on the Craigavon area hospital and £43 million on the Causeway hospital, for which I am particularly grateful to the Minister, especially as I understand that the tenders were received yesterday. We hope that the plan can go ahead.

The plans also show £64 million to £65 million of expenditure on the Royal Victoria and £39 million on redevelopment of Altnagelvin area hospital, following £7 million on recladding that hospital. By any standards, those are huge sums of necessary capital expenditure. We are grateful to the Minister and the Government for finding such sums, but there is the problem of travel times to those hospitals and the provision that will be made in them. Those sums are not found out of thin air. The expenditure has downstream consequences. Antrim hospital is up and running. Causeway hospital has been started after 35 or 40 years. There are geographical considerations and the problem of the smaller satellite hospitals which revolve around those acute centres. The Government are sometimes not quite honest and forthright enough to say to people that, once provision A is made, provision B will be diminished or hospitals may close.

Let us consider the consequences of Altnagelvin down the years. A series of small hospitals scattered over the city of Londonderry and surrounding areas out as far as the Roe valley and Limavady are closing. I wonder what will be the consequence of the huge expenditure on the acute hospital in the long term. At the end of the day, hospitals are not provided for the convenience of the medical staff; they are provided for the benefit of the patients. Sometimes, that fundamental fact of basic need vanishes into the bog of hospital provision and the arguments on how well we can provide high-quality care on a particular site. Travel times are of great importance, especially in cardiac cases and for those injured in severe accidents involving brain or spinal injury.

To return to my local interests, I should like to highlight a problem in the provision of cancer services and follow-on treatment at the Causeway hospital. The Minister will be aware of the horror stories that we always hear of individuals getting into an ambulance or other form of transport early in the morning, travelling 50, 60 or 70 miles to receive treatment and then travelling all the way back. To put it mildly, that is very difficult to put up with.

We need to provide follow-on treatment as close as possible to the cancer patient's home. For that reason, I and the medical staff in and around the Causeway site are worried by the reports that much of the cancer provision for the whole Northern board area will be in Antrim. People in Antrim say, "Oh, well, it will be mainly in Antrim, but there will be something at the Causeway site." We want to know now what services will be provided at the Causeway hospital. There seems to be a drift all the time towards centralisation. Fifty miles is a long way for someone who is ill and finds it difficult to travel even a short distance. I hope that the Minister will take a personal interest in the matter and see what can be done about it.

It is not all doom and gloom with regard to hospital provision. We have witnessed an astonishing drop in acute hospital beds in the period covered by the document from 5,634 to under 5,000. That was achieved in the years 1991, 1992, 1994 and 1995. In the same period, hospital admissions rose from 265,000 to 315,000, which is a huge increase. The increase in day care cases, from 48,000 to nearly 90,000, has been even more remarkable. Those bright spots show the benefits that accrue from advances in medical science. We all welcome that, but where does that lead us regarding hospital provision in 10 or 15 years' time? I know that the Minister is neither a prophet nor a dishonourable prophet, but perhaps he can make an educated guess about such future hospital provision in Northern Ireland.

One problem, which is associated with the general lower standard of health in Northern Ireland, means that Northern Ireland and Wales are battling it out as to which will be the worst region for waiting lists in the United Kingdom. I wonder when we will reduce our waiting lists to the Scottish level, which is remarkably good compared with those of the other three jurisdictions in the United Kingdom. Scotland has done very well, and perhaps we should consider the methods employed by the Scottish Office to see what can be done to improve the health care of our people.

I am also concerned to note that, in the period covered by the expenditure plans and priorities, the number engaged in administration has increased by about 2,000, while the number of home helps has fallen from 3,200 to under 2,000. The care of our aged people presents a serious problem, not least because there are more and more of them with each passing year. Those carers are not necessarily in better health than their charges. I support the concept of care in the community and care in one's own home. It is extremely bad for old people to be taken out of their familiar surroundings and bunged somewhere far away from their family and friends. That option should be the port of last resort. It should be made available only to those who are so incapable of looking after themselves that they need nursing care. There are a lot of people who reach that stage.

Care at home is not cheap, especially when there is no family available to provide it, or even when they can. I have looked after aged relations with dementia, so I am aware that the burden placed on the family of the carer is unbelievable. I hope that the Minister will take steps to provide increased respite care for the folk who need it—there are a lot of them.

I am also concerned about care in the community for those who are mentally ill or mentally handicapped in one way or another. It is a dangerous process to move some of those people out on to the streets because they are incapable of caring for themselves.

I shall conclude shortly, because I know that the Minister and the Opposition spokesman are itching to get to their feet—one to assault and the other to defend. I am

concerned about the incidence of smoking and alcohol consumption among young people. I believe that changes in diet and way of life are generational and that they pay rich dividends. The mother is the most likely person to influence the diet of youngsters. I suggest to the Minister, therefore, that young women should be targeted more at schools so that they are better educated and better trained about the provision of a healthy diet for families. Some people may think that is sexist, but the reality is that it is women who determine the diet in the home. They need more and more proper training. That is true of young women not only in Northern Ireland but throughout the United Kingdom.

There should be more education on the dangers of smoking, never mind drugs and the rest of it, as well as on the dangers of alcohol. That is why I object to the changes that are constantly made to make alcohol more readily available every day of the week. We are getting to the situation where society is floating on an ocean of alcohol. Although I understand that those alcohol sales may benefit the Chancellor in the immediate term, I believe that the right hon. and learned Gentleman and all the community will suffer in the long run. If anything could be done to educate people against the dangers of excess consumption of alcohol, it would be all to the good, because there is far too much drinking in Northern Ireland, never mind elsewhere.

10.35 am

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): The Minister seems surprised that I have anything to say. I appreciate that his engagements in Northern Ireland may mean that he is not au fait with how the extended Adjournment debates on a Wednesday morning work. I guarantee to leave him the bulk of the remaining time in which to reply.

First, I congratulate the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) on arranging the debate, which is timely and important given the severe difficulties that many hospitals throughout Northern Ireland have faced recently, and continue to face. It is worth recalling that the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) has reminded us that other engagements mean that other hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland are unable to attend the debate. Hospital provision concerns every hon. Member from Northern Ireland, from every part of the political spectrum, largely because it is of such deep concern to their constituents.

The problems were presaged by the cuts in the health budget last year. The Royal Victoria, Ulster and Mater hospitals, and those in the Causeway and Green Park trusts, have been the most seriously affected—6,000 operations and 55,000 out-patient appointments have been cancelled since the summer.

The problems became so serious that the Royal Group in particular made arrangements to cut a further 1,700 operations and to offer that capacity to fundholding general practitioners. Because of that, the Department of Health and Social Services managed by some mysterious process, which I suspect may involve the 1997-98 budget, to find an additional £3.3 million for the Royal Victoria and Ulster hospitals. As the hon. Member for East Antrim said, the final figure is likely to be £5.2 million. The final irony is that it may not be possible to spend that money in the remaining few weeks of the current financial year.

The difficulties have their origins in a combination of the NHS reforms that have been pursued by the Government and this year's cut of about 3 per cent. in the health budget. Even if the House takes the most generous view of the Minister's assertion that that contains a 1.5 per cent. efficiency saving, we are still left with the reality of a 1.5 per cent. service reduction in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has experienced cuts of at least that scale.

In fairness, the Minister has never attempted to hide the facts. As the June edition of the *Nursing Standard* quoted him:

> "'As a Minister I have to come clean and tell you that efficiency savings are just not possible . . . Therefore I acknowledge that there will be cuts in services and I don't like it any more than you do.' Mr. Moss, addressing the first conference of the RCN management association in Northern Ireland, added: 'As a Minister I can't stand over cuts like that for too long.' However, he insisted he would not resign over the matter."

That is precisely what happened—cuts were made but no resignation was forthcoming.

The cuts are obvious to all involved in the delivery of health care in Northern Ireland. A recent report from the British Medical Association spelt out the difficulties, and noted that the Northern Ireland Consultants and Specialists Committee had stated:

> "Efficiency savings are cuts by another name and this constant haemorrhaging of funds has seriously weakened health care in the Province. We were disturbed to learn that some hospitals are having to restrict operations for non-urgent cases and that in others there is little money available to buy new equipment in order to meet efficiency targets.
>
> We intend to take our findings to the Minister and the Chief Medical Officer in the hope that the current round will not be so harsh that it impedes good clinical practice. Clearly, the hospitals in the Province cannot sustain another round of imposed efficiency cuts."

The story is there to be read in the waiting list figures, which the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) highlighted. Waiting lists overall grew 2 per cent. in England in the 12 months up to September 1996; the comparable figure in Northern Ireland was 13. During the same period, the number of people waiting more than 12 months fell by 40 per cent. in England but increased by 75 per cent. in Northern Ireland. Those are not figures, but people waiting for treatment and care, and they are still waiting today.

The most corrosive of the Tory reforms has been the wholly artificial internal market, which has set hospital against hospital and doctor against doctor, replaced co-operation with competition and fragmented decision making, making strategic planning much more difficult. It has distorted the relationship with patients, as the primacy of contracting clashes with the best interests of the patient, and produced a system where price too often takes precedence over quality. It has generated an explosion of unnecessary bureaucracy, with individual contracts and the pricing of individual items of surgical procedure producing an avalanche of paper throughout the system. Most damaging of all, it has led to the substantial inequity that is undermining the cardinal NHS principle of equality of access.

Experience throughout the United Kingdom, and Northern Ireland specifically, has brought to light innumerable cases where the likelihood of receiving acute or secondary treatment has become dependent on the management arrangements of the patient's general practitioner rather than medical priority. The chief executive of the Royal Group of Hospitals and Dental

[Mr. Jim Dowd]

Hospitals health and social services trust, Mr. William McKee, when announcing the reductions in the Royal in the summer, said as much. He was quoted in the *Belfast Telegraph* as saying:

"We can only provide services where the Health Board or fundholding GP is providing finance. This means that where a person lives and whether or not the GP is a fundholder"

will

"determine who we . . . treat."

The chief executive of the Eastern health and social services board, Dr. Kilbane, had to write to all the acute trusts in the area last autumn, following a conference of GP Forum, which represents fundholders and non-fundholders. He wrote:

"A very strong view was expressed at the meeting that General Practitioners were increasingly concerned at the use of criteria other than clinical need for choosing the order in which patients in the Board's area are treated. The Forum asked that the Board should draw to Trust Chief Executives attention and that they in turn should convey this view to clinical staff, that clinical need"

alone

"should be the criterion which governs the order in which patients are treated and the treatments they receive.

I would be obliged if you would draw this strongly held view to the attention of appropriate . . . staff".

There we have it; a patently two-tier system—evidence of which is now incontrovertible—and the latest revelations from the Royal Victoria hospital, mentioned by the hon. Member for East Antrim, merely provide further proof.

The development of the internal market has not only distorted priorities, but wasted a great deal of money that should go to front-line patient care. We are well aware that the last thing that is needed is the destructive, dogmatic process that has been the Government's hallmark. We are keen to engineer change—health service professionals want changes—but we are fully conscious that the only way to construct enduring and beneficial advance is step by step, taking people with us as partners in the process to achieve our objectives.

Nowhere will that be better demonstrated than in our plans for locality commissioning. We intend the strategic planning of the health boards and the provider responsibilities of acute units to remain, but the decisions about what treatment to organise on behalf of patients should be drawn together in local GP commissioning groups. In the light of such changes, the role of health boards will be changed and they will be able to reassert their traditional strategic role.

I was very interested in what the hon. Member for East Londonderry said because he alluded to some of the key strategic issues concerning the changing nature of the delivery of health care and the need to take some fairly hard decisions. When I first served on the health authority just the other side of the River Thames—in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham—in 1976, we had 14 hospitals; today we have four. It has not been easy to achieve, but it has involved—more than anything—taking people with us rather than simply telling them what is good for them. To some extent, that element has been missing from the management of the health service in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) mentioned the problems relating to the Royal Group of Hospitals and Dental Hospitals health and social services trust, the Belfast City Hospital health and social services trust and other trusts. At present, formation of trusts throughout the health service is entirely spontaneous, and without strategy. At no time have services been considered, not institutions; what patients receive, not bricks and mortar. Even the recent merger of the Ulster Hospital trust and the North Down and Ards Community health and social services trust was driven solidly by the financial position of the Ulster hospital, not by any view about what care packages patients need.

This is the atomisation and break-up of the health service that the reforms have engendered: providers, commissioners, community care and acute services are considered almost as separate businesses. That must end, as must the evasion of hard decisions, which will have to be taken—in many cases, the sooner the better.

A Labour Government created the NHS and, if the British people give us the opportunity in a few weeks' time, it will fall to a Labour Government to rescue and renew it, by re-establishing our vision of a comprehensive health service, publicly funded and publicly operated, free at the point of use and universally available on the basis of clinical need alone. A Labour Government will make a substantial difference and change the disastrous course on which the NHS throughout the United Kingdom is set.

10.45 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) on his success in getting this important subject debated today. He, like many other Northern Ireland Members, has long been involved in efforts to improve and maintain hospital services, especially in his constituency. I know of his tremendous efforts a few years ago to retain acute services at the Moyle hospital in Larne. Although his fight for retention of acute services was unsuccessful, the efforts of the hon. Gentleman and those associated with him, in Larne borough council and elsewhere, did much to convince the Northern health and social services board of the need to keep the Moyle open and retain a range of services there.

Today's debate has given hon. Members from Northern Ireland an opportunity to raise issues concerning hospital services, albeit most of the hon. Members present are from one political party. They have raised some important issues and I have listened extremely carefully to their comments, which ranged widely. I shall try to respond to some of the more important comments now, but I suspect that, in view of the limited time that has been left to me, I shall be unable to cover all of them so, in the time-honoured tradition, I shall write to hon. Members about any substantive issues that remain outstanding.

During my two and a half years or so as the Northern Ireland Health Minister, I have come to realise that local communities and the Members of Parliament who represent them take great pride in their local hospitals and staunchly oppose anyone—certainly any Minister—who for any reason seeks to alter the status of a local hospital. Nevertheless, I believe that it is my duty, as the Minister with responsibility for health and social services, to consider the overall strategic picture and to assess the future of local hospitals in that context.

That issue has been raised by several hon. Members this morning. The question was asked, "Have we got regional strategy right?" At some stage, when we have

gone out to consultation on this, I shall want to hear what hon. Members regard as a more appropriate regional strategy for the future.

When I spoke in the debate on the Department's new regional strategy for the period 1997 to 2002 in the Northern Ireland Grand Committee in March 1996, I emphasised the necessity for all of us involved in the governance of Northern Ireland to consider the wider picture and to address the matters holistically. Today, I re-emphasise that need. We must decide together how best to spend the limited money available for health and social care, so that we can attain the highest possible levels of care, levels equivalent to or better than—I prefer to consider the "better than"—those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The money and resources available for health care cannot match the ever increasing demand—a fact of life that we must all, like it or not, accept. It follows therefore that we must be ready to adapt and change health care provision, to ensure that the highest quality of care best suited to need is accessible to everyone.

This is where the balancing act comes in: between the pressures to concentrate resources and provision at a limited number of regional sites, and the needs of local communities, particularly in the more rural areas of Northern Ireland where people live some distance from the main regional centres. I do not claim for a moment that these decisions are easy to make.

All this means providing treatment in the most appropriate settings where the necessary skills and expertise are available. In terms of hospital care, many factors besides purely financial ones have been at work for some time now and are driving change in the way hospital services are provided. I want to mention a few of them this morning.

First, more patients than ever are being treated as out-patients or day patients. Secondly, day surgery—a point mentioned by the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble)—is growing at a tremendous rate. Thirdly, as a result of these and other factors, lengths of stay are generally declining. Fourthly, new treatments allow care that was once provided in hospitals to be provided in more local settings. Finally, the report known as Calman 1 has resulted in a move towards a consultant-provided service—as opposed to what used to be a consultant-led service.

One immediate outcome of changes of this kind is a reduced requirement for in-patient beds. Moreover, increasing specialisation by doctors leads to a concentration of work on fewer sites in order to provide the case loads necessary to retain and develop skills. There is evidence to suggest that that concentration leads to better outcomes for patients—for instance, in the treatment of some cancers. Changes in the hours of junior doctors, which we all welcome, mean that they now work in larger teams that require sufficient volumes of work to develop their skills.

It is clear to me, and I hope to all present today, that in these circumstances Northern Ireland cannot sustain its current pattern of 18 acute hospitals all providing in-patient acute care. That does not make clinical sense; nor does it make economic sense. The Department's regional strategy for 1997 to 2002 was published last year and envisaged specialised acute hospital services being concentrated on far fewer sites, so that patients can receive their care from highly skilled specialists, and can benefit from the latest advances in medical technology.

Acute in-patient care will in future be built around the cornerstone of Northern Ireland's six major hospitals—the Royal Victoria hospital, the Belfast City hospital, Craigavon, Antrim, Altnagelvin and the Ulster. There will of course be other hospitals, as we said in the regional strategy document; but the misconception persists in Northern Ireland that we will be left with just six hospitals. That is not true.

As I have said, we want to provide care at the appropriate level and in the appropriate setting. That involves balancing the idea of providing the latest high-technology care in the bigger centres against the other services that must be provided near people locally. That will mean retaining other hospitals besides the six that I have listed, but they will not be doing the same things.

There is no doubt that the role of local hospitals will change. Some of them, along with the six, will continue to provide a range of acute services, although that may be a smaller range than at present. They will do that possibly by linking up with each other or with the larger hospitals to secure clinical expertise and maintain the quality of care.

Rev. Martin Smyth: With modern technology, is it not possible to tap into the expertise of world-class specialists, even in small local hospitals? That is why I referred earlier not so much to more people but to using technology better.

Mr. Moss: That is an extremely important point. The use of modern information technology will certainly enable more advice to be given and work to be done at smaller hospitals, since it will allow for more contact between consultants. Initially, however, consultants may offer more peripatetic services in a given area instead of just being based in one large hospital.

Other smaller local hospitals will evolve to deliver a range of complementary services such as out-patient clinics, specialist nursing services, convalescent and rehabilitation services, and diagnostic and therapeutic services. The hon. Member for Upper Bann raised some concerns about the Banbridge hospital. We are mindful of the possibility of some delays in relocating the services that will remain there. After all, the decision that I took was only to remove the in-patient services. We intend to retain out-patient and diagnostic services at the hospital site, and we intend to spend money on revamping the nursing block which is still on the site. Treasury rules demand that we look at private finance initiative solutions, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I am pressing for those rules to be waived in this instance so that we can get on with the necessary work on the building and move the services from the current site.

Mr. Trimble: I thank the Minister for stating that he is pressing to have Treasury rules removed—I trust that he will be successful—but I also noticed that he was talking only about continuing the existing out-patient services. Can he also give us some hope of the technological developments that he has just been describing being applied to the site?

Mr. Moss: We intend that there will be more than just out-patient services on the site. I mentioned diagnostic

[Mr. Moss]

and therapeutic services. We invited local GPs to discuss with us which services would best be provided in Banbridge rather than elsewhere. We fully intend to provide as many services as possible—as make sense—in Banbridge, to save the local population travelling some distance along those roads, with the associated problems of the ambulance service to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): What role does the ambulance service have to play in this scheme of things? How many ambulance crews have been trained as paramedics; what encouragement are they given to train as paramedics?

Mr. Moss: That is an extremely important point. In view of what hon. Members have said about the ambulance service, I am slightly concerned about it and shall be examining it over the next few weeks. I shall then answer the points that they have made. We encourage paramedic training, but in future some emergency treatment will be offered in the primary care-led service, not the secondary care-led service. The ambulance service can still have an important role, but resuscitation after heart attacks might in future be done in the primary care service instead of in hospitals, in the first instance.

The pattern of hospital provision in Northern Ireland will be affected by the major strategic change which involves the health service moving from being secondary care led to being primary care led. Cardiac services at the Royal have been mentioned. It is certainly disappointing that the problems arose, but the understanding is that the Royal will treat 1,100 cardiac cases a year. They will come from boards and from fundholders. An additional 100 are allowed through the private system. If seven cardiac cases from the Republic of Ireland are treated, they are an extension of that private provision and are not displacing people from Northern Ireland who need cardiac surgery.

The Royal hospital took the view, back in the autumn, that it might not hit the target that it sought to achieve, but it decided just after Christmas that it would. Fundholders who turned up with money to purchase surgery were told that the complement had been filled—the hospital cannot do more than 1,200 cases. The target agreed at the start of the year has been met.

With reference to the acute hospitals reorganisation project—AHRP—and the McKenna report, I shall be making a decision on that in the near future. It is a difficult decision, as the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) pointed out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time is up, I am afraid.

Asylum Seekers

11 am

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I want to bring to the attention of the House the particular difficulties faced by the London boroughs because of the problems of asylum seekers.

There are, of course, asylum seekers and asylum seekers. I entirely support the policy of the Government to help genuine asylum seekers, but to discourage the growing number of people from abroad who come to Britain on holiday, as students or in some other capacity and, when the time comes for them to leave, declare themselves to be in need of asylum.

The matter was adequately dealt with by the Social Security Committee report on benefit for asylum seekers, which was an all-party document that pointed out that it was costing about £200 million a year for those people, many of whom could reasonably be called economic migrants and some of whom are just benefit seekers on holiday, to remain in Britain. It is wrong that ratepayers in the London area should bear an undue proportion of the burden of expenditure that those people are causing.

I understand that many people want to come to Britain to work, but there is a procedure whereby people can legitimately become part of our community. People who come as economic migrants are sidestepping that.

The Government, with cross-party backing, decided to do something about the matter. The Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 stated that people whose application to remain in Britain had been turned down could no longer receive the social security and housing benefit that they had previously enjoyed. That is estimated to have cut the number of bogus asylum seekers by about half.

It is a great worry to me and many others that the Opposition home affairs spokesman seems to want to scrap the legislation and return to the previous situation. I would consider that extremely irresponsible. It would open the floodgates again, and presumably the £200 million-a-year cost that was estimated when the legislation was introduced would again become part of the charge on the British taxpayer.

In order to try to subvert the legislation, a case was recently brought before our courts and to the High Court which sought to overturn the provisions that the Government intended. The Government are keen to help genuine asylum seekers, but do not want them to be sucked into the racket of evading our immigration laws.

The judges effectively, although not directly, overturned the decision that the Act produced and said that those who declare themselves destitute must be given assistance under the National Assistance Act 1948. The problem of supporting them has landed largely on the inner London boroughs, where most of those people migrate as there is more to do in central London. I am sure that many of them are working illegally, and of course work is readily available in big cities.

The London councils have a particular problem. They are now providing for 3,000 single males, many of whom are from east European countries recently liberated from oppressive regimes. They cannot by any means be said to be from countries where they would find themselves in grave political difficulties if they had stayed at home. There are also about 2,000 families, with young children who must be supported. The cost of that to Westminster council is estimated to be £2 million a year, but over London as a whole, the cost is running at about £140 million a year, which is a great deal of money to be found from the council tax budget.

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): I would not want my hon. Friend to mislead the House. She should point out that the figure that she has just quoted represents the net expenditure which will fall on the city council. There is a great deal of further expenditure, which is paid for by grant.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my right hon. Friend. He is a great authority on the matter, as he represents Westminster city council. I know that he has an important contribution to make.

Goodness knows how much it costs for the legal aid that those people invoke to keep challenging the decision that they are not bona fide asylum seekers.

The *Daily Mail* today reports the case of a woman from Russia who has managed to stay in Britain for five years. According to the magistrates court yesterday, she has cost the British taxpayer £40,000. She was arrested, of course, for stealing. I do not know how people who are not bona fide asylum seekers and whose applications have been rejected time and again manage to remain in this country for so long at the expense of the British public, but the system clearly needs tightening up.

A number of London boroughs—Hammersmith and Fulham, Lambeth and Westminster—are to challenge the judges' decision, as it has placed an enormous financial burden on the taxpayers in central London. Before that decision, Westminster had five applications from asylum seekers for help, but since the judges' decision in October, the number has increased to 300. At present Westminster city council is accommodating 66 families with children and 338 single adults, half of whom come from eastern Europe and are able-bodied males.

Westminster is in a unique position because, being the centre of the capital city, it must also accommodate many other homeless people who find their way to London and take up temporary accommodation places. That means that the alleged asylum seekers whom the council is obliged to support often have to be put in expensive accommodation. There is a limit to the number of cheap bed-and-breakfast places in the centre of a city like London. Much of the accommodation is in hotels, which can charge a great deal more for a week's bed and breakfast than the sum that the council considers adequate, and certainly more than the sum that might be adequate in outer London boroughs or in other parts of the country. Therefore we have this unique situation, which Westminster has to deal with.

The Government have announced—this is most welcome—that they are to contribute £165 a week for each asylum seeker while their requests for asylum are being endlessly considered. Of course, in some parts of Britain, that may be adequate, but in Westminster it is not. It has done detailed homework and it can prove that, on average, the cost for the council is £215 a week for a single adult—and that is based on shared bed-and-breakfast accommodation, not on very expensive flats.

The National Assistance Act says that the assistance given to these people must be provided in kind, which means that Westminster city council has to use its meals

[Mrs. Gorman]

on wheels service to take food to them, wherever they are placed, whether in the centre of London or in outer boroughs. In addition to the breakfast that comes with the bed-and-breakfast accommodation, they have to be given a packed lunch, presumably in case they decide to go shopping in the middle of the day or to do a bit of work on the black economy—who knows? They also have to be provided with an evening meal and snacks to keep them through the day because the assumption is that they have no money—they have declared themselves destitute.

In addition, the council has to provide those people with a hygiene pack, which must include a toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, a flannel and deodorants. For a family of half a dozen, six sets of those commodities must be provided. Presumably, if those people are here for long enough under such terms, they will have to be provided with clothing, shoe leather and who knows what else. All that cost falls on the British taxpayer and particularly on Westminster residents. The council estimates that, in addition to what the Government are proposing, about £35 a year will fall on each council tax payer in Westminster.

Again and again in the House, we hear the Opposition spokesman on housing, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), assert for the umpteenth time that all the residents in Westminster are terribly well off, so they can easily afford those extra charges. Nothing is further from the truth. Part of his act—because it is an act; he does it every time he gets the chance—is to cite people living in Mayfair and Belgravia, which we all know are two of the most expensive neighbourhoods in Britain.

The truth is that, out of 100,000 households in Westminster, only 1,500 are in Mayfair and only 3,000 are in Belgravia. Many of those people live in old-style housing association Peabody flats. They are on modest incomes. Many of them are elderly, managing on their state pension and perhaps also a little pension from their work. They pay their full rent and for all their own expenses. Now they are going to be asked to pay £35 to able-bodied males who have come over here on a prolonged holiday and now claim that the British taxpayer should support them.

In one case, a man from Romania, who came over here on a coach tour for a football match—if the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) would listen, she would hear practical examples—decided that he did not want to go back, declared himself an asylum seeker and is still here four years later. He has never done a stroke of work in his life. Why should someone who is elderly and who is scraping along on their basic income have to support people in those circumstances?

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My hon. Friend is exploiting a rich seam and she is doing so assiduously. Is she aware that there is widespread resentment? This morning, I was reading a letter from a constituent of mine, who has fallen into a Catch 22 situation between health and social service provision, about the assistance that is available to people who do not have the right to reside in Britain, yet are milking not only the taxpayers, but the caring services, on which so many others depend.

Mrs. Gorman: My hon. Friend is entirely right. In my constituency at the weekend, I had the case of a woman who has managed to remain here for five years by playing the system. She has given birth to two children while she has been here and she is so addicted to the social services that, when she needs to go shopping in Basildon, she telephones her social service assistant worker and asks for a minicab to take her there because she cannot bring back her shopping. That is a fact, which I will and could demonstrate if I had to. Such things go on and they get up the noses of all constituents, including those of Opposition Members, who seem to think it is funny that elderly British people, who are managing to live on their modest incomes, should fork out for alleged asylum seekers, who are simply parasites.

As I have said, Westminster has a particular problem and particular expenses. My purpose in bringing this matter to the attention of the House is to say to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health that Westminster's special circumstances should be given special treatment. Best of all, we acknowledge that, although this matter has to be dealt with, it is a national problem and should not be landed on the doorstep of a relatively small group of residents in the centre of London, who have many other problems associated with residence in London and who need to be given special care and help.

This matter needs to be aired because I am talking largely about Westminster. Of the 100,000 households in Westminster, more than half are on below-average incomes. Westminster has inherited many Greater London council estates such as Mozart and Lissom Green, which are given special estate assistance grants by the Government to help the low-income people living there, who have particular problems, but those people are all part and parcel of the community charge scheme. In addition, about 16,000 households live in either Guinness Trust or Peabody estates, which again cater specially for people on modest incomes. They provide good-quality homes, but, like everyone else, the people who live there pay their rates and 50 per cent. or perhaps more are elderly people on modest incomes.

As I was a member of Westminster city council, I have many friends among the residents in those places—people who used to be my constituents. It is true that, in many cases, they have made careful provision for themselves in their old age, have a small additional pension as well as their old-age pension and pay all their rent and their bills and ask for nothing from the state. They are proud and happy to do so. Such people should not be exploited by people who are exploiting the system.

In Britain, about 70,000 alleged asylum seekers are going through umpteen appeals against deportation. All of them can exploit the loophole provided by the National Assistance Act. It is an extremely important matter. I have outlined some of the costs in Westminster, but the people are distributed throughout Britain and other council areas will be grateful for the assistance that the Government have already announced. However, it ill behoves Opposition Members to laugh at this and to treat it as a joke. We know what they would do because we have heard it from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman: they would sweep away the measures that the Government have tried to introduce and reinstate the previous position.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gorman: Would the hon. Gentleman forgive me because I want to sit down soon and let others into the debate?

The cost will again be landed on the doorsteps of British taxpayers, and particularly on the doorsteps of Westminster city ratepayers. They do not deserve to have to pay those costs out of their own pockets.

11.19 am

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): This debate is welcome in the sense that it provides an opportunity to talk about the problem of asylum seekers and the situation facing local authorities. However, I think that the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman)—who, today, appears to be batting for Westminster council—should pause for a moment to think about why people seek asylum. Britain is a signatory of the 1951 Geneva convention, which requires that if someone is genuinely and legitimately in fear of persecution for political, religious or social reasons, they should be guaranteed a place of safety in the country to which they flee. That principle should be adhered to.

Britain has among the smallest numbers of asylum seekers of any European country. Compared to most other continents, Europe has one of the smallest numbers of asylum seekers. The real burden of the world's refugee crisis falls not on western Europe but on Mexico, Jordan, India and on other countries that are near to places where there has been great civil strife or which have Governments who are deeply oppressive towards their own people. So the idea that there is a huge flood of people trying to get into western Europe and into Britain, and particularly into Westminster city council accommodation, is slightly over-egging the pudding. It is also missing the point.

It is a major step for someone with a legitimate fear to seek refuge in exile. So far as I am aware, no hon. Member has been woken up by the police at 4 am, taken into custody with no rights of access to a judicial system, and, with his or her family, forced to flee into exile for their own safety. It is not an experience that most British people have had, and we should think very carefully about what a major step it would be to undertake such a journey.

When asylum seekers arrive in the United Kingdom, they must apply for asylum. Under the new legislation, if they do not apply immediately at the port of entry, their chances of being granted asylum are severely diminished. If one has grown up in Iraq and has always been completely terrified of anyone wearing any type of uniform, it is fairly unlikely that—after managing to steal oneself out of Iraq, possibly using false documentation, aliases, guides and other measures—one will trust a person wearing a uniform whom one encounters when first arriving at the airport. It is more likely that one would first get out of the airport and then think about the next step.

In the United Kingdom there has been a systematic erosion of people's ability to seek asylum and to have their cases properly determined. There has also been a vindictiveness against asylum seekers—it has been parroted in this debate by some Conservative Members—which has been promoted by some newspapers, particularly the *Daily Mail*. For very many years, that newspaper has had a long and dishonourable record on this issue.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman will tell the House what mandate he has from the British people to share their citizenship with foreigners.

Mr. Corbyn: I am unsure how one answers such a totally ludicrous question. If someone has a legitimate fear of persecution, they flee abroad and try to seek asylum. Many people sought asylum from Nazi Germany. Presumably the hon. Gentleman, on the basis of his comment, believes that they should not have been admitted to the UK, and that people fleeing from oppression in any regime should not be admitted. He talks utter nonsense. I suggest that he start to think more seriously about human rights issues. Suppose he had to flee this country because an oppressive regime had taken over. Where would he go? Presumably he would not want help from anyone else, because he does not believe that help should be given to anyone else.

Let us return to the issues facing people fleeing areas of oppression. Currently if they arrive here, seek asylum and are refused, they have lost all access to benefits. They then have to undergo an appeal process, which can take a very long time. During the appeal process, what on earth are they supposed to do unless they are declared destitute and consequently supported by a local authority? We need to restore benefit rights for all people pending the outcome of their appeal. Not to do so is a gross abuse of individual human rights. Moreover, removing benefit is not saving any money because, in many cases, it costs far more to look after the children involved by placing them in foster care than by allowing their families to look after them in the normal and proper way.

We should consider the experiences of people who have fled countries. A couple of weeks ago, I spent several hours talking to a group of asylum seekers from Iran. That regime—despite the fatwa against Salman Rushdie and numerous other human rights abuses—is beginning to be cosied up to by the British Government and by the rest of western Europe, because they now prefer to support Iran rather than Iraq. The people whom I met told me, chapter and verse, of how they had been treated by the regime in Iran—of how they had been summarily imprisoned, with no access to the courts; of how their families had been beaten up and abused while they were in prison; and of how the regime murdered one man's fiancée in front of him because he would not talk about the secret activities that he was supposed to be involved in. I heard about many other similar cases.

Those people came to this country and applied for asylum. Their applications were refused, and they appealed. They are now living a life of virtual destitution, while the Home Office ponders what to do for them. Those people stood up for their communities against an oppressive regime. I remind the House that merely because a regime calls itself democratic does not mean that human rights are guaranteed. Around the world, many regimes call themselves democratic and have a multi-party democracy, but that does not mean that human rights are universally respected or that people are safe.

The hon. Member for Billericay said that no one in eastern Europe has any justification for seeking asylum. That is a sweeping statement. I presume that she has not

[Mr. Corbyn]

had an opportunity to read the papers from Amnesty International or from Helsinki Watch on what is happening in Albania.

Mrs. Gorman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Corbyn: I will in a moment.

Perhaps the hon. Lady has not had a chance to consider what is happening in Romania, where homosexuality is a criminal act, or in Bulgaria and other places. All is not well merely because there is multi-party democracy and a market economy. Perhaps events in Albania are not a credit to the market economy system.

Mrs. Gorman: I did not say that every eastern European's application for asylum in this country was bogus. However, many countries that were in the former Soviet sphere of influence have now established democracies, and some people from those countries come here to claim asylum. Of those claiming benefit from Westminster city council, about 50 come from countries in which there is no longer oppression.

Is the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) aware that—in a report signed by Labour Members—the all-party Social Security Select Committee, which considered the matter, stated:

"Any responsible Government would want to examine ways of controlling expenditure of £200 million a year, when it is known that well over 90 per cent. of people"

who claim asylum turn out not to be genuine? Genuine applicants, such as those described by the hon. Gentleman, are frustrated and suffer delayed applications because of those who are not genuine.

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Lady seems to have moved on a bit from the cant and prejudice that she produced in her earlier speech. However, she does not deal with the point. I am a member of the Social Security Select Committee and took part in that inquiry. I did not sign that section of the report, although I produced a minority opinion, which I am sure that she would disagree with profoundly. However, that is up to her.

I merely want the hon. Lady and the House to understand that democracy does not always follow multi-party elections. The UK, for example, prides itself on its close relationship with Turkey, yet many Kurdish people have fled Turkey and appealed for a place of safety here. Many of them have died trying to get out of Turkey because they have a point of view that is different from that of the Turkish Government. I think that there is a foreign policy implication and potential initiative in that situation.

Since last year, people from the Ivory Coast have sought asylum in the UK. I recall a discussion with the Home Office about the safety of people from the Ivory Coast. The Minister told me that he was assured that everything was okay in the Ivory Coast. The students whom I met who had sought asylum in this country from the Ivory Coast told me that their Government were so keen on carrying out the economic wishes of the International Monetary Fund and others that they were crushing anyone who opposed them—they crushed trade unions and they crushed student opposition, sending troops into various universities and closing them down. Is that how a democratic Government should behave? No. We must recognise that those people from the Ivory Coast are justifiably seeking asylum.

Dr. Godman: I hesitate to intervene in the debate, because I come across few asylum seekers—an experience that I suspect that I share with the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham). I have come across a few at Greenock prison. One concession was offered a few months ago by the Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe)—a promise that those women seeking to avoid the infliction of genital mutilation would be given sympathetic consideration when seeking asylum. That is at least one concession in this picture of unrelieved gloom.

Mr. Corbyn: At least the Minister was forced into that concession during a debate in this Chamber. I wonder whether those who make decisions on refusing people asylum, refusing them benefits and forcing them into destitution have ever taken the trouble to sit down and listen to the stories of people who have been tortured and abused.

The process depends on refugees applying at the point of entry. That is often difficult to do, for reasons that I have already outlined. It is also often difficult for people to talk about the torture experiences that they have been through. Many soldiers who were tortured during the second world war found it difficult to talk about their experiences for years. That is no different from the position of people who have been tortured in Iran, Iraq, west Africa or anywhere else. The issue is not simple. They feel a sense of failure, a sense of humiliation and a sense of defeat. We should have a different attitude towards asylum seekers.

Almost uniquely among European countries, this country routinely puts in prison people who seek asylum. There are nearly 900 people in British prisons who have sought asylum. It costs £20 million a year to keep them in prison. I have been given a letter from several people who are being held in the Home Office holding centre at Haslar. They complain about their treatment and the way in which the immigration service carries out its duties. They say:

"Another problem, literally fatal for certain detainees, is deportation without prior notice of the date being given. Those under notice for many months are often collected from Haslar for deportation at a week-end when it is quite impossible to have recourse to their solicitors or other help."

We should think a bit more seriously about how we treat those people.

For the past few weeks, there has been a hunger strike at Her Majesty's prison in Rochester. I understand that that hunger strike is not continuing at the moment. When I raised the issue on a private notice question, the Home Office Minister was dismissive. She appeared to have no understanding of the moral force of people undertaking a hunger strike to draw attention to their problems. Hon. Members should stop and think for a moment about the circumstances of those who come to this country seeking asylum, go to prison with no direct access to the courts and then, thinking that they have been badly treated and fearful of what will happen, undertake a hunger strike and, in some cases, a refusal to take fluids. If that happened in

another country under a regime of which we disapproved, the British Government would say that it was a terrible indictment on the human rights record of that regime that prisoners were forced to undertake a hunger strike to draw attention to their situation. In this country, people who say that get routine abuse from Home Office Ministers and Conservative Members. Stop and think for a moment about the moral courage of those who have undertaken a hunger strike to ensure that their case is at least looked at.

Attitudes towards asylum seekers need to be changed. Routine imprisonment should end. Access to benefits should be restored for those applying for asylum. If they are refused asylum but are undertaking their legitimate right of appeal, they should continue receiving benefits until the appeal has been determined. It is wrong to force them into destitution or to throw them out of the country, often with no access to lawyers or anyone else.

The Government's regime on asylum seekers is creating a serious situation, with a class of destitute people that is paralleled across Europe. Those who have applied for asylum, have been refused and are fearful of deportation end up going into hiding in the poorest areas of Paris, Frankfurt, Madrid, Berlin, London or Amsterdam. They are subject to the worst kind of exploitation by rogue employers, drugs and prostitution. They cannot reveal their identity because they would be deported. Only the Churches around Europe have drawn attention to the issue and tried to do something about it. I hope that we shall recognise that we should have a slightly more humane approach towards asylum seekers in this country.

Last year, the Churches Commission for Racial Justice held a conference called, "Why Detention?" A report of the conference has been published. There was universal condemnation of the principle of imprisoning asylum seekers and a plea for a more understanding approach. Europe must stop its xenophobic attitude towards those who seek a place of safety here and adopt a more humane approach.

There is also a foreign policy agenda. Where is the outright condemnation from the Government of the denial of human rights in Iran, Iraq, the Ivory Coast and many other countries? I find it very muted on many occasions. They seem more interested in trade and selling arms to those regimes than in defending human rights. History shows that unless we stand up for human rights wherever they are abused around the world, eventually it will come back and our human rights will be abused. A lot of brave people in this country have stood up for the rights and needs of asylum seekers. Local authorities are being told that they should pay a large share of the bill. I do not want them to have to do that. Central Government should give more support to local authorities to ensure that asylum seekers do not live in destitution. Above all, I want a change in attitude and a more humane approach to this serious problem of the victims of injustice from around the world.

11.36 am

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): I shall be briefer than my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), because this is a short debate and I want others to get in. I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate.

The problem that we are discussing arises from the autumn of 1995, when various announcements were made at the Conservative party conference about the Government's intentions. There was evidence through the autumn of that year of a lack of interaction between Government Departments. Brussels often praises Whitehall for having better co-ordination between Departments than any other Government in the European Union, but that co-ordination was not in evidence in this case. The Social Security Advisory Committee wrote a hostile report on the Government's intentions. I suspect that once the Home Office had legislative cover and clearance for its Bill, it washed its hands of the consequences, which would fall on other Departments.

On Second Reading of the Asylum and Immigration Bill, in December 1995, I alluded to some of the problems that I could foresee. I mentioned in particular the problems of unaccompanied children coming to Westminster and other central London boroughs. Perhaps as a consequence of that debate, there was a delay in bringing forward the amendments to the benefit regulations, quaintly named the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996. The Opposition were satisfied with a 90-minute debate. Some Conservative Members felt that that was inadequate time to discuss the regulations. I was the last to speak before the replies to the debate and was allowed three minutes. I said that the drama that I foresaw would be played out on the streets of my constituency rather than those of some of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench who were introducing the measures.

A legal case went against the Government in the summer, as a result of which they had to amend the Bill in the House of Lords with primary rather than secondary legislation. As has been said, on 8 October the decision was taken that obliged local authorities to provide assistance to single adult asylum seekers. That decision was challenged in the Court of Appeal, and the appeal was defeated. That series of legal defeats reflects rather badly on the degree of co-ordination involved in the preparation of the legislation before its introduction. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay, I am briefed primarily by Westminster city council, but I shall allude to other areas of central London later. At the heart of the problem is the fact that it is being dealt with on a piecemeal, rather than a co-ordinated, basis.

My hon. Friend referred to the £165 per week grant provided by central Government. That is an average figure drawn from estimates that the Government received, which ranged from £95 for cold weather shelter provision to £290. That scatter of figures derives from outer and inner London areas. As the Bishop of London reminded us during the centenary service for the King's Fund only yesterday, costs outside central London are quite different from those in inner London. For two reasons, the £95 for cold weather shelter is an unrealistic figure for provision in central London. First, the rough sleepers initiative has absorbed so much of the accommodation that might be used for that purpose that the central London boroughs no longer have access to it. Secondly, asylum seekers are specifically excluded from cold weather shelters.

Westminster pays £175 for accommodation alone, before the addition of extra sums that it must provide. The rough sleepers initiative, conducted by central Government in conjunction with the voluntary sector, has been a great success. The number of those sleeping rough in central London has fallen from more than 1,000 to

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

below 400 in the past six or seven years. This is a prime case where central Government would render major assistance if they took over the co-ordination in conjunction with the voluntary sector, upon which a great deal of the burden of the problem falls. That would instantly reduce the average unit cost. The piecemeal approach adopted at present increases the likelihood of fraud.

It is recognised widely that the burden of the problem falls on local authorities in London, and primarily on those in inner London. I freely acknowledge that Westminster is not the only authority involved: the borough of Islington is affected in the same way. I alluded to the problem of unaccompanied children during the Second Reading of the Asylum and Immigration Bill in December 1995. This year, Westminster will spend £1.2 million on unaccompanied children. There is no logical reason why Westminster and one or two other boroughs should uniquely absorb that problem. Unaccompanied children—who come to this country extremely well prepared—simply go to a handful of authorities in central London about which they have heard or to which they have been directed, and the council tax payers in those areas must foot the bill.

There is a hazard to community and race relations in central London if such costs continue to fall heavily on council tax. The burden constitutes a risk to the quality of community and race relations in those areas and, in that respect, I endorse my hon. Friend's comments. At the margin, community care budgets are being diverted to this problem and away from council tax payers.

I put it to my hon. Friend the Minister—for whom I have some sympathy—first, that all unavoidable costs resulting from the programme should be reimbursed to local authorities that are acting on behalf of the nation as a whole. Secondly, it would be immensely desirable if the Government would announce their grant levels for 1997-98. It is now 5 March and the fiscal year ends within a month. However, local authorities do not yet know what level of grant the Government will provide.

I hope that the Home Office—in this respect I make common cause with the hon. Member for Islington, North—can improve the speed with which it processes these cases. Between December 1995 and May 1996, applicants under the legislation prior to 1993 waited an average of 43 months for initial decisions. Between October and December 1996, the waiting time increased to more than 48 months. The comparable statistics for those who were treated under the legislation that was introduced in 1993 are 10.7 months in the earlier period and 12.2 months in the second period. The time taken by the immigration appellate authority to determine appeals lengthened from eight to 10 months in the same period. Outstanding appeals increased from 14,000 in February 1996 to nearly 22,000 at the end of last year. So the burden on local authorities is being extended because the process of handling applications is slowing down rather than accelerating.

I said that I sympathise with my hon. Friend the Minister, who will come to the Dispatch Box on behalf of the Department of Health as much of the expenditure flows through that Department. However, I am not sure that the Department of Health should necessarily take the lead in co-ordinating this process. It originates in the Home Office, and I believe that it would be desirable if that Department took the lead—not least because a lack of co-ordination at the end of 1995 led to this situation. I promised that I would be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I now sit down within 10 minutes.

Several hon. Members *rose*.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Five hon. Members hope to catch my eye in the 25 minutes before the winding-up speeches begin. With the co-operation of the House, I hope that they will all be successful.

11.46 am

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I shall try to be brief. The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) has discussed this subject on several occasions and raised the issue of responsibility. His speech contrasted considerably with that of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) at the beginning of the debate. I must admit that I was one of those who laughed at some of the things that she said, not because I do not take the subject seriously, but because it was obvious that she does not have the slightest clue about who asylum seekers are, the circumstances in which they find themselves, and what happens to them.

I agree that London boroughs should not carry the responsibility for asylum seekers, but what are the alternatives? The right hon. Gentleman suggested that the Government should shift the responsibility somewhere else. The hon. Member for Billericay seemed to endorse the Government's option of appealing the court decisions and returning to their favoured position of removing benefits completely and leaving asylum seekers with absolutely nothing. I remind the House that the measure applies to asylum seekers who apply in country, and not to those who apply at the port of entry. That is despite the fact that the success rate for asylum applications of people who apply in country is at least as great as—and sometimes greater than—that of people who apply at the port of entry.

In the first four months of last year, 775 people were awarded refugee status, 610 of whom were in-country applicants—precisely the people who have been denied benefits. The Government were warned about the repercussions from the beginning. The Social Security Advisory Committee warned the Government not to change the social security regulations in 1995, and pointed to the likely consequences of that action.

The Government's reasoning was the same then as it is now: they still talk about economic migrants and benefit scroungers. Anyone who deals with asylum seekers knows the reality. It is rubbish to say that people come to this country because the benefits here are more than the average wages in the countries from which they have come. They may be, but we should consider what that means in real terms, and what standard of living people have had in their own countries.

An Algerian asylum seeker told me that he had been a general practitioner in Algeria and that his wife had been a vet, but people were telling him that he had come here to live on benefits. I have known an 18-year-old Somali girl for a couple of years. She is struggling to look after six children younger than herself. They all live in a bed-sit, and she showed me photographs of her house in

Somalia, which has a mosque in the back garden that her father built. Yet we tell those people that they have come here to live on a few pounds a week in benefits.

The people who manage to get to this country are usually not the poorest or most downtrodden. The poorest people are in refugee camps in neighbouring countries: that is where the majority of refugees end up. How many of the 20 million refugees worldwide are trying to get to Europe, never mind the United Kingdom?

The Government lost the court case on the benefit regulations. At the last minute, they included these provisions in the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. Time and again, those of us who served on the Committee considering that Bill and who participated in the debates asked what would happen and who would have ultimate responsibility. We said that local authorities would be stuck with the problem of having to deal with children under the Children Act 1989 and with homeless people on the streets. We did not know then that the courts would decide that the National Assistance Act 1948 could be used. We pointed out the problems and said that council tax payers would have to pick up the bill.

Even if we accepted the Government's view—which I do not—that only a tiny proportion of people who claim asylum are genuine refugees, we cannot defend a policy that leaves genuine refugees destitute. The hon. Member for Billericay defended the Government's position. Even if only a small number of cases are genuine, how can anyone defend such callousness? Genuine asylum seekers will be left without a penny to live on. Only one other country in Europe has such a policy, and that is Italy. On the outskirts of large towns such as Naples one sees shanty towns full of asylum seekers. That is the logical consequence of the Government's policy.

It is a disgrace to any civilised society even to consider leaving genuine asylum seekers without a penny to live on. That is what we should be debating, not the financial position of a few local authorities that have been dropped into this mess by the Government, who want to leave them in that mess. Hon. Members should read the Refugee Council's report, which shows the impact that having to live on nothing has on the lives of asylum seekers. People have to walk miles to soup kitchens to get a meal.

As the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South said, delays should be eliminated. Why are people having to wait four or five years for a decision on their case? Why are the queues getting longer? In 1993, we were told that the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 would make things better, and we were told last year that the 1996 Act would makes them better, but waiting times are getting longer. If we want to encourage people to make bogus applications, the way to do so is to let the queues get longer, but that penalises the genuine asylum seeker. I believe that the majority of applicants are genuine: I do not believe the 90 per cent. figure.

Long queues encourage the bogus applicant, so the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department should do something about it. Why has the number of cases awaiting appeal gone from 13,000 to 21,000? Many of those people will have to await their appeal—which they may well win—without a penny, because their benefits have been cut off. Do not tell me that that is what happens to people who are refused benefits through the social security system. Few people who are refused social security benefits are left destitute without a penny. The people who are refused benefit tend to be those claiming a particular benefit to which they are not entitled.

We should not treat in such a way people who come here to escape from appalling conditions. They may have been in gaol and may have been tortured. To put them on the streets without a penny is a disgrace to any society that calls itself civilised.

11.55 am

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) on securing this debate. The topic of asylum seekers is fundamentally important for two obvious reasons. First, it matters crucially that this country honours, as it always has, its obligations under the Geneva convention. It is equally important that abuse of the asylum rules by the large number of people who make asylum applications knowing that their position as illegal immigrants has no bearing on the Geneva convention should be debated openly, so that it is fully understood and tackled.

Bearing in mind the fact that year in, year out the number of people found to be genuine Geneva convention cases ranges from 1,000 to 3,000, it stands to reason that the other tens of thousands of applicants include people who knowingly abuse the system. Those people do a disservice to genuine refugees, who are held up in the queue, to which the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) alluded, and do not receive the treatment and care that should come their way.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wardle: I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman and I have often discussed this matter, but I am aware of the time, and I would like to make progress.

Britain has always honoured the Geneva convention, and has given sanctuary to people with a well-founded fear of persecution in the country from which they are fleeing and whose first safe country landing is in the United Kingdom. The only occasion that I know of when our proud record under successive Governments of honouring the convention was sullied was the recent al-Masari case. Reference to the primacy of British business interests in Saudi Arabia brought the integrity of our asylum criteria into question, and, when the Government lost the appeal, a thoroughly undesirable person was allowed to remain in this country and continue his political activity.

I want to make three points on detention, the asylum queue and the wider issue of asylum, the European Union and broader immigration policy. Much of what is said about detention is confused or misleading. Protesters may genuinely be concerned about refugees in detention, but the fact is that only a tiny proportion of applicants are detained. In virtually every case—not in 100 per cent. of cases, but in almost all of them—a detainee is someone whose appeal has been refused, who is waiting to be removed from the country and is only temporarily in detention, or whose application has been refused and is awaiting appeal but is considered likely to abscond. However, it is a tiny proportion of the number of people concerned.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Wardle: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I must make some progress.

[Mr. Wardle]

My next point concerns the asylum queue. As I have already said and as is widely known, there are people in the queue who have arrived in this country and been welcomed as visitors but who have then overstayed that welcome, found work and assimilated themselves into the local population, quite unlawfully. When apprehended and questioned, they are frequently advised by immigration lawyers or advisers to apply for asylum because, once they are in the queue, they can stay here and qualify for social security. As my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) said, it may take four years to resolve the case.

Recently, Ministers have pointed to the fall in the number of asylum applications and to the success of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. It is a welcome development if some bogus applicants are no longer applying, but it does not deal with the underlying problem of the queue. In December 1995, on Second Reading of the 1996 Act, I explained what I felt was the only way to tackle the problem, which was not simply to pass more legislation—Bills do not resolve what is fundamentally an administrative problem—but to process the queue swiftly.

On Second Reading, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said that some 75,000 people were in the asylum queue at the end of 1995. He estimated the cost to be about £200 million a year. I said that I had every reason to believe that he was grossly underestimating the costs and that when the figures for social security, housing, school places, the health service and so on were added to that figure, the cost was likely to be closer to £500 million or even £750 million a year. I recommended that he should think again about his promise to spend £37 million on the appeals section of the asylum division and on the Lord Chancellor's Department and that he should spend about £150 million a year for two years to process the queue. As the hon. Member for Walthamstow said, once the queue is gone, the attraction of making a bogus claim disappears. At the same time, it would help the genuine applicants because they could be dealt with promptly.

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend said that everyone is concerned about people going into detention and many people do not go into detention. The Home Office is unable to give me an answer to my question, but perhaps my hon. Friend will have some idea. Does he know how many people who do not go into detention but who are bogus asylum seekers disappear and do not turn up ever again?

Mr. Wardle: I cannot give my hon. Friend an exact answer. Undoubtedly many people who are not detained but are in the queue and see their appeal coming closer to resolution, disappear into the undergrowth. That is unlawful and wrong and should not happen. It is all very well to talk about new legislation and new measures, but while the queue exists, the temptation to join it as a bogus applicant is there. That is fundamentally wrong. We must process the queue and ensure that those who do not qualify for leave to remain in this country are removed from here, including those who have absconded. That is being missed in all the headline chasing about new Bills every other year. That is not what is needed. We need competent administrative action.

I should like to raise the link between asylum and the European Union and the wider but directly related issue of immigration and border controls. Under the third pillar of co-operation in the EU, there has for several years been harmonisation of asylum policies—the Dublin convention is one example of that. The European Commission wants to go much further—it is perfectly open about its ambitions. It wants to take the third pillar into treaty competence and that includes asylum policy. The Government have said that they will resist that and I am sure that they are right to do so. The cornerstone of that resistance is not to allow Britain's border controls to be dismantled, as is required by the existing European treaty. The moment those border controls are gone, the ability to determine where a person has landed as the first safe country becomes confused.

There was recently a welcome announcement by the Dutch Government that they now recognise—the operative word is "now"—that no future British Government will willingly relinquish border controls. I should like to believe that it is significant that, until I made a fuss about this two years ago, there were no Government speeches or great policy statements on the subject of our border controls. There was only the occasional furtive and uneasy answer to parliamentary questions. Undoubtedly, Ministers in other EU member states and their officials all assumed that, sooner or later, Britain would cede its border controls when required to do so by the European Court. That position has changed, but the battle is not yet over.

The best thing that the Government can do is to be open and frank about the legal threat to our position as it now stands. There has been some progress with the recognition by the Dutch, but the problem is still there. By rehearsing the nature of the problem openly rather than glossing over it, the full force of British public opinion, including people of all ethnic origins, would be brought to bear to persuade the Commission that this country will not wish to change its stance.

Unfortunately, time and again Ministers have given Parliament the strong impression that the Government consider that they have a sound defence against the requirement in article 7A to dismantle border controls. The Government, effectively, seem to face both ways because they have said that they will never give away the border controls, but then say that we have an adequate defence.

It might be as well for Ministers to remind themselves of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" which states:

> "Ministers have a duty to give Parliament and the public as full account as possible about the policies, decisions and actions of the Government and not to mislead Parliament and the public."

They should also remember the Scott report. which said:

> "If the account given by a Minister to Parliament withholds information on the matter under review, it is not a full account."

Time and again we have not been given a full account on this subject in Parliament. While the Government gloss over our vulnerability but assert, at the same time, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has done, that the Government will not break European law, we are not getting to the bottom of the problem. The only way to do that is to be open with Parliament and the British public and to ensure that, with the force of British public opinion behind the Government, these matters can be dealt with to British satisfaction at the forthcoming

intergovernmental conference. To do that would put our asylum and immigration policies into the proper framework. This is a subject to which I fully intend to return in the next Parliament.

12.7 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I speak as the Member of Parliament for Dover, which is a port of entry, and which has many immigration officers who have to carry out difficult work. They enforce our border controls with great difficulty, because there are many attempts at illegal immigration using asylum techniques, fraudulent documents or other methods. They face a difficult battle. There are police officers and special branch people at the port, as well as five social security benefit fraud investigators to deal with many of those who try to get into this country to take advantage of our system, either to claim benefits or to gain residency here.

Although many of us may support the Geneva convention and want to see people with a legitimate fear of persecution being able to come to this country for protection, we do not want people to take advantage of our compassion, and many of them who come here are doing that. When the recent hunger strike at Rochester was investigated, it was found that nearly all, if not all, the people involved were not genuine asylum seekers but illegal immigrants who were being detained with a view to being deported. Many people want to take advantage of this country.

The world is full of economic migrants, who can travel more easily than ever before. I accept that there are trouble spots, but there are not as many as asylum seekers would have us believe. We must also face the fact that, even in the case of brutal dictatorships such as Iraq, we cannot take in all those who suffer. I would like to help all those people who suffer from Saddam Hussein's actions, but we cannot do so. Almost the whole population of Iraq is persecuted and oppressed, and we could not take them all in.

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend has cited the example of Iraq. If people are desperate to get out of Iraq, why do they not go to Jordan or somewhere else in the middle east? Why do such people come all the way here? Is it because they are seeking the economic benefits of this country? Why do people have to traverse a continent to get away, instead of going to the country next door?

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend raises the question of how so many migrants, who seek asylum or become illegal immigrants, reach this country.

Mr. Gerrard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shaw: I cannot give way again, because of the shortage of time. Too many asylum seekers enter the country initially as family visitors, tourists, students and business people, and then suddenly discover that they want to remain as asylum seekers. That is why the Social Security Select Committee produced a report on the Government's proposals. I accept that the report was not unanimous, but we had no difficulty in saying that the Government's actions were right.

The problem is that far too many people have jumped on the asylum bandwagon. There is an industry supporting people who try to remain in this country when they cannot justify their presence. I have recently come across the Migrant Training Company. Labour councillors in Camden have apparently been involved in a £1 million fraud with taxpayers' money, and European grants have gone astray. I understand that a Labour parliamentary candidate has also been involved. There is a serious possibility that Labour councillors in Camden will have to be surcharged as a result of that fraud.

We have to face the fact that real problems are caused by asylum policies and immigration. We cannot go on meeting the bill, which at one stage was £200 million a year, for attempts by 40,000 people to seek asylum. Many of those people are not genuine. My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) mentioned a lady from Russia, who is an arts graduate and claims that she had problems at her university. That is not a good enough reason to cost the British taxpayer £40,000. The situation cannot continue.

I have much sympathy for Westminster council, which has had to bear considerable costs. Outrageous accusations have been made that the resources that Westminster receives from the Government are unfair, but it bears many costs that should properly be borne by the whole country. It is the central authority in London. I also have sympathy for Kent, which also bears some of the cost of asylum seekers. Dover district council has also had to bear the costs of some cases. It is unfair for local authorities to have to bear the costs, when the Geneva convention is a national policy.

It is also unfair that Camden council, and other Labour councils involved in the Migrant Training Company, are abusing the system and engaging in fraud. The Government have a serious problem, because they cannot tell councils that they will take over 100 per cent. of the bill, but allow Labour councils to take advantage by setting up fraudulent companies, such as the Migrant Training Company, for the benefit of Labour councillors and a Labour parliamentary candidate.

Mr. Corbyn: Where is the evidence?

Mr. Shaw: The evidence is sitting in the Department for Education and Employment, which has a European Court of Auditors report showing that the company has been involved in serious fraud. That is a disgrace, and the Labour councillors and members involved should be exposed. The Government have the right approach, but I have much sympathy for the councils that incur unreasonable expense.

12.15 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): I congratulate the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) on obtaining her Adjournment debate. The issues she has raised concern a number of London boroughs, but I am not sure that some of her general comments were helpful. I remind her that it is easy to raise and exploit fears about immigration, but the challenge in a multiracial society is the maintenance of good race relations.

The Government's defence is that the current shambles over payments under section 21 of the National Assistance Act 1948 is not their fault, but the fault of the judges. The Government claim that the judges have put local authorities in an invidious position, and that they have rushed to the rescue with a special grant to help out the local authorities.

[Ms Ann Coffey]

I am not sure that that is a correct assessment of the judgment. The judges in the Court of Appeal said that, because asylum seekers were disqualified from assistance under the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, they automatically qualified under the National Assistance Act 1948 for assistance from local authorities. As the 1948 Act had not been repealed by Parliament, the judges interpreted the general will of Parliament as a desire to continue to provide for those in need. That is the principle that has been behind the poor law for 350 years.

The present situation of local authorities is not the fault of the judges, in the stark way that the Government claim, but arises from the confusion caused by two conflicting Acts of Parliament. Clearly, the legal advice received by Ministers was not entirely sound. The local authorities had to appeal, because the Government refused to reimburse them for payments they made under section 21 of the 1948 Act. It was clear that the local authorities would not be reimbursed without a legal ruling that would enable Ministers to blame the judges for the Government having to pay for an alternative benefits system for asylum seekers, administered at a high cost by the local authorities.

I might add that the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 did not remove asylum seekers' entitlement to national health service treatment. Asylum seekers would be admitted to hospital if they became physically ill through lack of funds, suffered hypothermia from sleeping on the streets or contracted a disease. If asylum seekers become mentally ill as a result of stress and depression, they would be entitled to treatment under the mental health Acts. It would be interesting to see the after-care programme for such cases.

Yesterday, when we discussed the special grant of £165 for each asylum seeker that the Government are giving local authorities, I asked about cash payments. The Department of Social Security has ruled that such payments are not lawful under the National Assistance Act 1948, and would not be eligible to be reimbursed, although the expenditure is lawful under general local government powers.

I understand that there is conflicting legal advice, but the present situation is absurd. Social workers' time is being used to deliver groceries and take people shopping. One silly example is that people cannot be given money for toothbrushes, because they have to be bought for them. The hon. Member for Billericay gave the example of the use of the meals on wheels service to provide food, when the service is already under much pressure. Local authorities could meet their responsibilities in a more cost-effective way if they could make direct cash payments. That idea should be pursued.

The recent Refugee Council report, "Just Existence", tracked 15 asylum seekers who had lost entitlement to benefit and were being offered various kinds of help by local authorities. No one reading that report could fail to be struck by the desperation of those people's lives and circumstances. Whatever the eventual judgment on their status, each personally saw overwhelming reasons for not being able to return to their country of origin, and would endure any conditions in this country rather than face that alternative. That is the reality that must be taken into account.

The importance to those people of resolving their status as quickly as possible is also clear. Several hon. Members have already talked about the delays, and I have a constituent who, after nearly five years in this country, has not yet had his appeal against refusal of refugee status heard. That is totally unacceptable.

The delays in the legal process need tackling. If the fundamental problem is not addressed, local authorities face the prospect of having to administer an alternative benefit system for asylum seekers, and to support them in hotels, bed-and-breakfast accommodation, hostels, flats and shelters. The administration will be costly, and will undermine local authorities' ability to perform their other statutory functions.

I know that the Government propose changes, as yet unannounced, in social services departments, but I would not have thought that the role of poor law administration was something that even the present Government had in mind for them. Of course, I could be wrong. Perhaps Ministers foresee the prospect, if a Conservative Government are re-elected, of an extended role for social services departments in dealing with destitution.

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Coffey: I cannot, because of the shortage of time.

As a civilised society, we should offer refuge to genuine asylum seekers; we must also be aware of our humanitarian responsibilities. Our objection to the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 is that it used the withdrawal of benefits to establish who was and who was not a genuine asylum seeker. That was always bound to cause undue hardship.

I understand that a further appeal will be made to the House of Lords, and clearly, if the Lords uphold the judgment of the Court of Appeal, the practice will cease to be an option, even for the present Government. We must therefore consider the best way of giving assistance and benefits to people entitled to them, whatever legislation that process falls under. The assistance must be fair and consistent, and must not carry high administrative costs.

12.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) on initiating this important debate. I assure the House that I have listened extremely carefully to the variety of points made by my right hon. and hon. Friends, as well as by Opposition Members.

Clearly there will not be time for me to deal with all the points that have been raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) raised several issues concerning the Home Office in connection with immigration and asylum policy, and I shall ensure that his comments are drawn to the appropriate Ministers' attention, so that he can be given answers. I shall also write to other hon. Members to deal with any other points that I am unable to raise during the short time available.

I must first make it plain that this Government and this country have a justifiable reputation for welcoming to our shores genuine asylum seekers escaping persecution and torture. But the escalating number of economic and bogus

asylum seekers who have come here, not because of persecution but because of the economic situation in this country and the benefits it affords them, has caused great concern.

There has been an abuse of the asylum system, as several of my hon. Friends have said. In 1988 there were 4,000 asylum applications; in 1995, the number had risen to a staggering 44,000. Yet by 1996, as a result of the changes that we made to benefits, it had fallen to 28,000.

Although there was an increase in the number of asylum seekers recognised as refugees—from 628 in 1988 to 2,240 in 1996—the proportion of successful applicants granted refugee status as a result of genuine applications fell from 23 per cent. to 6 per cent.

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Burns: I am sorry, but I hope that my hon. Friend will understand that I have only seven minutes left.

As hon. Members will know, asylum seekers who claim asylum at the point of arrival in this country are entitled to social security benefits that cover housing, food and other necessities. Rights to benefits have been withdrawn only from those who claim asylum after they have entered this country. It is those people who now pose such an onerous problem for local authorities.

It is worth looking briefly at how that happened. As some of my hon. Friends have said, the situation arose in early August, when a small number of people who had claimed asylum after entering the country, and so had been denied benefits, approached social services departments for aid. After social services provision was refused, four of the asylum seekers sought judicial review against the local authorities concerned, and an interim court order obliged the local authorities to accommodate them while proceedings were pending.

On 8 October 1996, the High Court ruled that local authorities had a duty under section 21(1)(a) of the National Assistance Act 1948 to provide services as a safety net of last resort to those who, by reason of their circumstances, were unable to fend for themselves.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, with the local authorities concerned—Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Lambeth—appealed against that ruling; the appeal was dismissed on 17 February. We are currently seeking leave to appeal to the House of Lords, because we do not accept that the National Assistance Act should apply to adult asylum seekers who are not elderly, infirm or disabled, and who have no need for community care services.

The judgment has had serious consequences for many social services authorities, especially in London. It has imposed a new duty on them to support people for whom they have never before had to provide services. Although the number of people claiming asylum in this country has fallen since the removal of benefits, thus suggesting that the intended disincentive to economic migrants is working, the numbers remain high, and the burden for local authorities is substantial.

On 21 February, 3,501 adults were being accommodated by London authorities, and at least a further 200 outside London. It is not right that such a financial burden should be imposed on council tax payers, or that services for local people should suffer as a result of the court ruling.

It is precisely because the Government are so concerned about the impact on local authorities of having to house asylum seekers that we are now making a new special grant available to help them to carry the burden. As the House will know, three types of grant are being made available: one for unaccompanied children, one for children accompanied by adults, and the grant for adult asylum seekers, which we approved in Standing Committee yesterday afternoon.

That last grant will allow claims from local authorities up to the equivalent of £165 per person per week, averaged over the relevant period, to help meet the costs of those individuals. In addition, authorities will be able to claim up to £10 per person per week for documented costs incurred in commissioning new premises for housing asylum seekers.

The local authority associations and individual authorities, including Westminster, were consulted on the details of the grant, and have been given guidance on how to claim reimbursement. I certainly accept that Westminster, which has featured prominently in the debate, has a very high number of asylum seekers—292 at the most recent inquiry—but it is not alone in that.

Two other London boroughs currently accommodate more asylum seekers than Westminster, and there are about eight authorities with similarly high numbers. We have listened to what they have said, and we consider that the special grant is a fair and reasonable response to their concerns about adults without children.

The House may be interested to know that the figures from the local authorities show that most of the London authorities are spending less than the £165 per week that we allow. The sums range from a low, in Ealing, of £90 per week, to a high, in Redbridge, of £164 per week. However, two authorities are excluded from that range—Newham, which says that it is spending £205 a week, and Westminster, which is spending about £226 a week.

It must be borne in mind that Westminster is being charged about £226 a week, and the neighbouring borough, Kensington and Chelsea, which is in many ways a similar local authority, about £119 a week. It would be wrong not to take an average figure rather than giving different amounts to different authorities, which would clearly not be any more cost-effective or efficient for the taxpayer. We have no plans to change the existing policy.

Mrs. Gorman: Is my hon. Friend aware that Kensington and Chelsea is giving cash benefits at the moment, which allows it to save about £30 a head? The hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) seems to agree with me that that is illegal.

Mr. Burns: Our legal advice is that it is illegal, but even—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We must now move on to the next debate.

Mr. Wayne Hood

12.30 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am most grateful for this opportunity to raise the circumstances of my constituent, Mr. Wayne Hood, who was convicted on 14 November 1996 of the attempted murder of his former foster parent, Terence Jarvis, and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. Jarvis was himself sentenced to seven years' imprisonment on the following day, after being convicted of the indecent assault of several children and young persons in his care over a period of 15 years.

Mr. Hood is a 27-year-old man who spent most of his childhood in care, latterly—from November 1977 until he was able to go into independent living—with Jarvis and his wife in an approved local authority foster home in the Kettlethorpe area of Wakefield. At the time of the offence, Mr. Hood was living in Kettlethorpe with his wife, Tina, and his young daughter.

On the evening of 17 March 1996, after a day's heavy drinking and a domestic dispute about his drinking, Mr. Hood visited the Jarvises' home and stabbed Terence Jarvis. I do not in any way condone Mr. Hood's actions that day, which he deeply regrets, but I believe that they should be considered against the background of his suffering in care over a long period.

The subsequent police investigation of the incident led to Terence Jarvis being charged on 15 April 1996 with four counts of assault and two of buggery between 1972 and 1989, when the four individuals concerned, including Mr. Hood, were aged between six and 16 and in his care. Jarvis pleaded guilty to the four specimen charges of indecent assault, with the two charges of attempted buggery to lie on file.

Terence and Althea Jarvis had been approved as foster carers for the local authority from 1975, and since then had fostered 15 boys, the placements varying in duration from a few days to many years. Althea Jarvis had been employed as a residential worker in a local authority children's home for 18 years, and her husband, who was a self-employed music teacher, had over time become the principal carer. Since 1976, the Jarvises had also fostered a young man with learning disabilities, and in March 1994 Terence Jarvis was approved as a fit person under the small homes regulations, and the young man remained in their care as an adult placement.

It was entirely as a result of the events of 17 March 1996—the attack by Wayne Hood on Terence Jarvis—that a series of disclosures of sexual abuse came about. As a result, an immediate local authority management investigation was launched, the social services inspectorate was informed, and the Jarvises were suspended as foster parents. Subsequently, they were formally de-registered as foster carers, and Terence Jarvis was de-registered as a fit person under the small homes regulations.

An independent counselling service has been established for those people who were directly affected, and the Wakefield area child protection committee has commissioned an independent case review. I am satisfied that the local authority is following the appropriate procedures in investigating the matter, and my sole concern today is to highlight what I believe to be the totally inappropriate four-year prison sentence being served by Mr. Hood.

The Minister will be aware of the public outcry over Mr. Hood's treatment, in view of the appalling catalogue of abuse that came to light during the court case. A campaign to free Mr. Hood has generated a petition signed by many thousands of Wakefield people, but his plight has been a matter of concern far beyond my constituency. I have had letters, including some from people in the Minister's constituency, expressing amazement that Mr. Hood should be behind bars.

Among those showing serious concern about the matter are a number who have had personal involvement with Mr. Hood's care. I have spoken to two people who nursed him in hospital as a baby. They outlined to me the serious difficulties that he had to face from the earliest part of his life.

When I met the Prime Minister recently to discuss the case—I am genuinely grateful for the personal interest that he has shown—I gave him a copy of a letter that I received in December from a couple who fostered Mr. Hood for nearly a year when he was aged seven. The Minister will also have seen the letter, which outlines serious concerns about Mr. Hood's experiences in care long before his placement with the Jarvises.

I am prevented from setting out my detailed knowledge of his experiences before that placement by the fact that Mr. Hood himself is not yet fully aware of the details of the record of his life from an early age. He is exercising his right to access his personal care file, but is at present not familiar with much of the information that it contains. He has, however, consented to my reading his file and quoting from its contents today. I am grateful for the help that I have received from Wakefield district council's director of social services and his staff in accessing relevant information.

I set out my detailed concerns about Mr. Hood's background, as described in the case file, in my letter to the Prime Minister of 26 February, following our personal discussions on the case a fortnight earlier. The Minister has seen a copy of that letter, and will understand its relevance to my concerns. I am especially perturbed about the fact that, at the time of sentencing, the court was aware of Mr. Hood's experiences with Jarvis, but apparently had no knowledge of the problems he had faced during the previous eight years.

Without going into the details given in the letter I have mentioned, it is apparent that Mr. Hood suffered a great deal as a child. The extent of that suffering is evidenced by the amount of time that he spent in hospital during the first 18 months of his life. Having been born on 17 October 1969, he spent from 22 October 1969 to 5 January 1970 in hospital. For the rest of 1970, he was in hospital again from 4 February to 6 March; from 9 July to 12 August; and from 10 October to Christmas. He was admitted again on 11 March 1971 and remained for more than a month, until he was transferred to a local authority children's home shortly after being made the subject of a care order. Most of those hospital admissions were prompted, I believe, by the consequences of serious neglect.

The Minister is aware of the serious concerns expressed about Mr. Hood's subsequent experiences by the foster parents who cared for him before his placement with the Jarvises. That placement broke down, and by the time he reached Terence and Althea Jarvis, in addition to several

short periods with his natural mother, his life had consisted of five periods in hospital, two separate foster placements and five years in a children's home.

In my letter to the Prime Minister, I drew particular attention to the entry on Mr. Hood's case record at the time when he was moved to the Jarvises. The social worker concerned wrote:

"Having just experienced the trauma of a failure of a foster home, Wayne would particularly be seeking the reassurance of being loved and accepted".

Instead, he suffered seven years of the most degrading sexual abuse.

I would have thought that such information about Mr. Hood's background was directly relevant to his state of mind at the time of the offence, but I understand that, for various reasons, it was not made available to the court, either before his conviction or before sentencing. I am not a lawyer, but I understand from Mr. Hood's solicitor, Mr. Michael Barber—who has been most helpful in working with me on the case—that various legal technicalities and anomalies meant that the circumstances that I have outlined—particularly the abuse of the young man by his foster parents—could not be accepted as any defence to attempted murder.

Mr. Barber has advised me that the abuse and psychological damage, which clearly amounted to provocation, could have provided a defence if the victim had died. I understand that the lack of discretion to treat such circumstances as a general defence is peculiar to our legal system, but the effect in Mr. Hood's circumstances is very obvious and extremely worrying.

The second aspect of what happened in court has also caused considerable disquiet. In view of the circumstances of the offence, I was astonished to discover—only recently—that the court did not have a pre-sentence report on Mr. Hood's background at the time when he received a four-year prison sentence.

I understand that the Criminal Justice Act 1991 would have required a mandatory pre-sentence report before the imposition of a custodial sentence, unless such a report was dispensed with owing to the exceptional nature of the case. That, however, was amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which removed the mandatory requirement for a report, while still containing a statutory presumption in favour of obtaining and considering such a report before sentencing. I am not arguing that Mr. Hood did not receive a fair trial, but I feel that those two factors must be taken into account in consideration of the appropriateness of his prison sentence.

I have a letter from the West Yorkshire probation service to Mr. Hood's solicitor, Mr. Barber. It was sent at the time when attempts were being made to have the case referred to the Court of Appeal. The letter—written by an experienced and respected probation officer—queries the possibility of a probation officer's report being made available to such an appeal hearing, and states:

"I would in any such Report be arguing very strongly for Wayne to be re-sentenced to a Probation Order with a condition he continues to see his counsellor".

I would be very surprised if any court in possession of a detailed pre-sentence report on Mr. Hood's background deemed it appropriate for him to receive a custodial sentence.

The Minister is aware that, because of concerns about Mr. Hood's imprisonment, a hearing took place on 11 December before the trial judge, Mr. Justice Walker, who declined to reduce the sentence. An application to a single judge of the divisional court of the Court of Appeal for leave to pursue the appeal further was refused on 16 January. Mr. Hood has been advised by his solicitor that, as far as legal procedures are concerned, there is nothing to be gained from pursuing the matter further.

I know that the Home Secretary has powers to order the review of such sentences. He has the power to recommend the exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy in cases in which the sentencing court was unaware of matters that might have affected the sentence, and in which no avenue of appeal exists. I believe, for the reasons I have given, that Mr. Hood's case clearly meets those criteria, and I hope that the Minister will consider exercising those powers in view of the circumstances.

I believe that Mr. Hood has already received more than enough punishment for an action that he deeply regrets. I see little sense in someone who has already been damaged by his experience of the care system as a child being even more damaged by his experience of the prison system as an adult. Mr. Hood is an intelligent, pleasant, presentable young man, who has, in my view, a great deal to offer. His wife and child are standing by him.

Let me end by quoting from a letter that I received from Mr. Hood's employer, Mr. Mark Fisher, for whom he has worked for about seven years. The Minister may be aware that his employers are sending money to him weekly in prison, so that he will have some pocket money to purchase small items.

Mr. Fisher describes Mr. Hood as an honest, hard-working man, whom he has come to regard as a friend as well as an employee. When Mr. Hood is released from prison, he writes,

"there is a permanent position of work with my company and hopefully Wayne can be left to get on with a happy family life which is all he ever wanted".

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): I have listened with care and interest to the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). I thank him for setting them out so clearly and sincerely. I am aware that, as well as writing to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary about Mr. Hood's case, he has raised it with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. As the Minister responsible for dealing with miscarriages of justice, I am always concerned when hon. Members raise matters such as this.

The hon. Gentleman could not have set out more vividly the evident motive and the mitigating aspects of this sorry case. I know that there is also some concern about it in his constituency, and, as he has said, in other constituencies as well.

It seems that, through none of his doing, Wayne Hood was given a poor start in life. Not only was he deprived of the stable support of a caring family which so many of us take for granted; worse still, as we now know, between the ages of eight and 12 he was subjected to sexual abuse at the hands of his foster father, Terence Jarvis. As the hon. Gentleman said, Mr. Jarvis has since been sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, and I therefore do not propose to say any more about his case.

It is not in dispute that it was Mr. Hood who carried out what must be acknowledged as a very serious offence against the Jarvis family. The issue is the stated harshness of his four-year prison sentence.

[Mr. Timothy Kirkhope]

I think it only right to say from the outset that, as the hon. Gentleman will know from the representations that he has made so far, real difficulties lie in the way of taking any action in respect of a person's sentence as handed down by the courts, whether through an exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy or under statutory powers vested in my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary—under section 17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968—to refer cases back to the Court of Appeal. I shall say more in a moment about those avenues, and about the mitigating factors in the case. First, however, let me briefly set out the circumstances in which the offence took place.

The hon. Gentleman himself first drew our attention to the case. I understand that Mr. Hood, who is now in his mid-20s, had only one previous conviction, although I note that that too was for a crime of violence. He had lived with the Jarvis family from the age of eight to the age of 15. I understand that he then moved out to stay with friends, but continued to see something of the family over the next 10 years or so.

On a Sunday night in March last year Mr. Hood went out drinking, getting home some time after 11 pm. It may have been the effects of alcohol or, indeed, the depressed state in which he was said to be, but, for whatever reason, there was clear evidence that he next collected a knife from the kitchen and set out for the Jarvises' home.

Meanwhile, Mr. and Mr. Jarvis had also been out for the evening. They got home at about 11.20 pm. Minutes later, Mr. Jarvis saw Mr. Hood come past his kitchen window towards the door. He let Mr. Hood into the house, thinking that he looked a bit the worse for wear. At that point, there was evidence that Mr. Hood had his right hand behind his back, in order to conceal the kitchen knife that Mr. Jarvis was not to know he was carrying.

Mr. Hood started to accuse Mr. Jarvis of breaking up his marriage. Then, producing the knife from behind his back, he stabbed him in the right side of his chest. Mr. Hood pulled the knife out of Mr. Jarvis's chest. Bleeding heavily, Mr. Jarvis staggered to the telephone to call an ambulance, before collapsing in his hallway.

That was not the end of it. Aware of some commotion, Mrs. Jarvis came down from upstairs, saw the knife and what had happened, and went to tend to her husband, who by then seemed to be unconscious on the floor. Mr. Hood pushed past her and stabbed Mr. Jarvis a second time, in the right side of the abdomen, as he lay wounded.

At about this time, the police arrived. They went to the back door, saw Mr. Hood still clutching the knife, and ordered him to put it down. He closed the door in an officer's face. Police went round to the front door. Mr. Hood had the knife at the throat of Mr. Jarvis's foster son, Paul Marshall. He refused to put down the knife or to back away so that someone could attend to Mr. Jarvis. The evidence was that he said, "I hope he dies. He's ruined my life for 10 years."

Mrs. Jarvis, by then hysterical, raised her hands to stop Mr. Hood getting any nearer to her injured husband, but, approaching from behind, he held her chin with one hand while using the other to hold the knife blade to her throat. He told police, "Come closer, and I'll slit her throat and his as well." Ambulance men had by then reached the scene, but Mr. Hood would still not let them near Mr. Jarvis. He said, "No, let him die slowly."

Unexpectedly, at that point Mr. Hood took the knife away from Mrs. Jarvis's throat and held it above her head. Seizing the moment, and with a courageous disregard for his own safety, PC Velickovic grabbed hold of Mr. Hood's arm. He knocked him to the floor, managing in the process to release the knife from the grip of Mr. Hood, who was then handcuffed and arrested.

Mr. Hood was charged in November on three counts: attempting to murder Mr. Jarvis; wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm; and threatening to kill Mrs. Jarvis. He pleaded not guilty to the first count of attempted murder, and guilty to the other two charges.

I have had the benefit of seeing the trial judge's sentencing remarks. It is plain that the court accepted that there was very substantial mitigation, for all the reasons to which the hon. Gentleman drew attention. However, he also said:

"I have made the maximum possible allowance which I feel I can make for the reason that you had to attack Jarvis. I have also fully taken into account the most persuasive submissions made by defending Counsel, who if I may say has so ably represented you at this trial. I do not think, however, that it is appropriate that I should pass a suspended sentence of imprisonment in this case. At the end of the day, you took the law into your own hands and tried to kill him.

In all the circumstances, the most lenient sentence I feel able to pass is a sentence of four years on count 1 for attempted murder. Count 2 does not arise, and the sentence on Count 3 is 18 months' imprisonment concurrent with the sentence on Count 1".

I note that the hon. Gentleman has raised with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister his concern that a defence of provocation is not available in the face of an attempted murder charge. The reason why provocation is a defence for murder but not for attempted murder is that the penalties are different. A person convicted of murder must be sentenced to life imprisonment; no other penalty is available. A person convicted of attempted murder may be sentenced to life imprisonment, but the judge has complete discretion in setting the sentence. The element of provocation can accordingly be taken into account in sentencing for attempted murder. I hope that that clarifies the point.

There followed an application on 11 December for a review of Mr. Hood's sentence. I have had an opportunity to see the grounds for that application. I note that they contain express reference to the hon. Gentleman's support for Mr. Hood's case. The judge took careful and fresh account of that support, of the case's significant mitigating aspects, of the apparent strength of local feeling that Mr. Hood should have received only a suspended sentence, and of various petitions and newspaper articles.

On the evidence available, however, the trial judge said that the jury's verdict, by definition, proved a specific intent to kill. Moreover, the medical evidence was clear: Mr. Jarvis could well have lost his life. It was thanks only to PC Velickovic's bravery that medical attention reached him in time. Upholding the four-year sentence, the judge said:

"I made the maximum possible allowance I felt that I could make for the reasons the defendant had for attempting to kill Jarvis. These reasons were amply established by the evidence, namely the undoubted fact that the defendant had been abused over a lengthy period while the defendant was in Jarvis' care".

The review of sentence procedure did not deprive Mr. Hood of the statutory right to apply for leave to appeal to the Court of Appeal. Such an application was

duly lodged. It was around that time that the hon. Gentleman first raised the case with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. We explained that, in the face of continuing proceedings, it was wrong for Ministers to comment or take any other action. Mr. Hood's correct course was to place before the court any matters which he and his legal representatives considered relevant to his appeal. I wrote to the hon. Gentleman to that effect on 15 January.

I note from the papers that leave to appeal was refused the following day, as the hon. Gentleman said. The single judge remarked:

"The offence of deliberately attempting to take the life of another is a terrible offence which calls for a substantial sentence. You had strong mitigation which the Judge took fully into account in passing a lenient sentence, although you do not so regard it. Leave to appeal should not be granted on the ground of a public clamour almost certainly based on an imperfect knowledge of the sentencing factors involved".

I know that the hon. Gentleman has since had a chance to discuss his continuing interest with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, to whom he has written again. However, it is against that background that we have been asked so consider taking action in Mr. Hood's case.

None of us would seek to condone the repugnant behaviour of Mr. Jarvis. He abused the trust placed in him as a foster father, and brought untold misery to the life of Wayne Hood, whom he sexually abused as a youngster. He is rightly serving a sentence on his own account. However, as the courts found, even that did not entitle Mr. Hood to pick up a kitchen knife and take the law into his own hands. He came close to killing Mr. Jarvis, and subjected Mrs. Jarvis and her foster son to a fearsome attack. He could have received a life sentence for that, but the courts had regard to the powerful mitigation advanced on his behalf.

The court of trial and the Court of Appeal have both adjudged that the four-year sentence imposed reflected the maximum possible allowance in the given circumstances. As I understand it, even Mr. Hood's lawyers, as the hon. Gentleman said, have concluded that there are no grounds for renewing an application for leave to appeal to the full Court of Appeal.

That being so, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand that there are no grounds on which it would be right for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to take action under section 17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968 to refer Mr. Hood's sentence back to the Court of Appeal for a further review of sentence. It is clearly not for me to offer legal advice to those concerned, but if there are said to be new or unexplored grounds that affect the length of the sentence and that have not already been before the courts, the correct course is to renew an application for leave to appeal.

The new Criminal Cases Review Commission takes up its powers on 31 March. Under section 13 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1995, the normal expectation is that the commission will not take action in a case until or unless all statutory appeal rights have been pursued. Sentencing within the limits prescribed by law, and subject to the right of appeal, is, and will remain, entirely a matter for the courts. It would not be right for the Government to seek to substitute their judgment for that of the courts, the more so when the courts have already taken such careful account of what I accept are powerful mitigating factors in Mr. Hood's case.

For similar reasons, I am afraid that Mr. Hood's case is not amenable to an exercise of the royal prerogative. Above all, the sentencing process should be transparent, and performed, as in this case, by the courts. Length of sentence is a matter for judicial discretion within the limits set by Parliament. It would be a wholly improper exercise of the prerogative to remit any part of Mr. Hood's sentence on grounds that are already before the courts, or were available to be brought before the courts.

I have noted with the greatest of care what the hon. Gentleman has had to say. This is a tragic case in every sense, and one which we have tried to approach sympathetically. He will be aware that I have seen his letter of 26 February to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. It describes what a tough and sorry time Mr. Hood had from the earliest age.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands that, if there are new or supplementary grounds of the sort to which he has referred, which those acting for Mr. Hood believe may impact on his sentence, the correct approach is to renew an application for leave to appeal to the full Court of Appeal. I do not wish to deter the hon. Gentleman from pursuing the matter further, if that is his wish, in the most appropriate manner.

Franco-German Armaments Agency

12.59 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the subject of British participation in the Franco-German Armaments Agency. Some may judge it an arcane, esoteric matter, yet the fact that so few have heard about it—judging from the attendance this morning, not many more will have heard about it following the debate—does not mean that it lacks military, industrial or even political importance.

Britain's accession to what began as the Franco-German Armaments Agency was accorded so little publicity as to be almost clandestine. There was no statement to the House. It was accorded laconic references from the Dispatch Box in defence debates and in answer to questions. The "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996" contained a section on defence procurement and the defence industry, with six unexceptionable paragraphs on procurement policies. The five paragraphs that followed, on collaboration, beg the questions that I shall put today, which I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement can answer.

Paragraph 434 of the statement says:

"Together with our WEU partners, we have also been pursuing the possible establishment of a single European Armaments Agency. Such a body might initially provide a forum for joint armaments research projects while opening the possibility, under the right conditions, of enhanced European co-operation in procurement."

I presume that the body would eventually subsume the work of the West European Armaments Group, the successor under the aegis of the Western European Union of the old Independent European Programme Group.

Paragraph 435 goes on to describe how

"The United Kingdom has agreed, in principle, to join with France and Germany in their current work on setting up an armaments agency which offers the potential to maximise the benefits of defence equipment collaboration. This follows the decision to collaborate with these two nations on our requirement for an armoured utility vehicle. The decision underlines the Government's commitment to play a full role in European defence collaboration at both the political and industrial level."

Quite why the multi-role armoured vehicle needs to be produced in collaboration when companies such as GKN, Vickers and Alvis could produce the vehicle perfectly well alone escapes me.

The assumption can now reasonably be made following Italy's accession with the United Kingdom to the Franco-German Armaments Agency that the quadrilateral agency, as it is now called in English, will grow with the accession of further European members and by the accretion of responsibility for additional equipment programmes into the fully fledged European armaments agency described in the defence White Paper. It must be asked why there is this preoccupation to participate in such bureaucratic European structures. It is more a feature of continental than British governance and there are further questions to be answered.

The Maastricht treaty's declaration on WEU specifically mentions

"enhanced co-operation in the field of armaments with the aim of creating a European armaments agency"

as a proposal to be examined further. The provisions in the Maastricht treaty on a common foreign and security policy relating to defence have always been taken seriously within the Franco-German-Italian axis in Europe.

Paragraph 1 of article J4 of the treaty states that the common foreign and security policy shall include all questions related to the security of the Union, including framing of a common defence policy which might

"in time lead to a common defence."

Paragraph 2 of article J4 states:

"The Union requests the Western European Union (WEU) which is an integral part of the development of the Union, to elaborate and implement decisions and actions of the Union which have defence implications."

The European Union has long held ambitions to arrogate to itself jurisdiction in armaments collaboration—indeed, ever since the Klepsch report on the subject to the European Parliament many years ago, perhaps as long ago as the good old days, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you and I were members of the British delegation to WEU—with the objective of finding an entrée to wider defence competence for the EU.

If anyone harbours any doubts of where Franco-German ambitions lie, he should read the text of the Franco-German common security and defence concept document issued after the bilateral summit in Nuremberg on 9 December 1996. It speaks of

"The common destiny uniting France and Germany."

The preamble is unambiguous. It says:

"In the European Union our two countries will work together with a view to giving concrete form to a common European defence policy and to WEU's eventual integration into the EU."

The guidelines for armaments co-operation in paragraph 4.3 of the defence concept document are even more specific. They are worth quoting verbatim. They say:

"Greater Franco-German armaments co-operation is not just in our bilateral interest since it also meets the objective of building a European armaments policy. It must in particular be the mainspring of a European solution to the general rationalisation of the European armaments sector. It will thus constitute an essential component of the common foreign and security policy and the common defence policy called for by the Maastricht treaty and a significant step towards the emergence of a European security and defence identity. The most economical solution must be resolutely sought for the requirements expressed by the armed forces and the establishment of a competitive European defence technological and industrial base. This necessitates common rules in the CFSP framework for the procurement and transfer of defence equipment within the European Union and for exports to non-EU states."

That implies an extension of EU competence in armaments procurement, transfer and—interestingly enough—exports, which are rightly matters for national Governments alone.

Just to confirm the goals of French armaments collaboration policy, it is worth reading the interview of Mr. Helmer, the French directeur général des armaments, or DGA—the procurement chief—in *Defence News* this week.

"What is important to us now is that the Organisme Conjointe de Cooperation en Matiere d'Armement"—

OCCAR, the defence agency about which the debate is being held—

"obtain a legal personality that will give it the ability to award contracts without having to go through the cumbersome administrative procedures of national procurement agencies and to receive multi-year financial commitments from member Governments."

How that is compatible with effective parliamentary control of expenditure in national Parliaments is not clear to me. Nor is the idea of multi-year financial perspectives.

in the European jargon, appealing to someone like myself, who of course went through all the trauma of the European Communities (Finance) Bill.

One should note that even this morning our own European Standing Committee B has been examining the European Union's Court of Auditors report on expenditure of the Union in which it is quite clear that more than 10 per cent. of expenditure is unaccounted for. One therefore wonders whether those European practices—I will not say Spanish—of fraud, waste and malpractice, now endemic in the EU, may not transpose themselves into the new bureaucracy to be formed as the European armaments agency.

It is again instructive for us to bear it in mind that our own National Audit Office, in a report just published on the latest Court of Auditors report on the European Union, confirmed that effective control of expenditure of taxpayers' money within the Union is almost non-existent. I hope that the same will not be true of the European armaments agency, although I must confess to having my doubts.

Although there is informed comment in the press and specialist circles that, ultimately, OCCAR will aspire to come under the aegis of WEU, it was not spawned by it. Nevertheless the question of to whom it will be responsible is very much a key one, as is how it will not develop protectionist, pro-European and anti-American preferential tendencies in its procurement policies. I have long deprecated the United Kingdom's propensity to be sucked along in the Franco-German slipstream.

Even the location of the OCCAR headquarters in Bonn, presumably to fill office space soon to be made redundant by the impending move of the German Federal Government to Berlin, is significant. I remember how my repeated pleas for the collocation of all the institutions of WEU at County hall, across the river, when its permanent council was already in London, fell on deaf ears in favour of Brussels.

If the founding document for the establishment of OCCAR, signed last year by my noble Friend Lord Howe, is studied, it looks clearly like a blueprint for a burgeoning bureaucracy, just as the Maastricht treaty, when studied, looked exactly like what it turned out to be—the blueprint for a united states of Europe.

European armaments collaboration has not especially benefited from the activities of agencies and their attempts at control. Certainly the NATO Multi-role Combat Aircraft Management Agency for Tornado Development and Construction and the NATO European Fighter Management Agency for the Development and Construction of the European 2000 do not seem to be models to me. Bilateral programmes such as the Jaguar, the family of three Franco-British helicopters, and now the Italian-British programme for the Merlin, have always been more effective than multinational programmes in Europe.

One must remember that American collaboration with the Goshawk—the T45—the AH64 Apache for our own Army and the C130J Hercules for the Royal Air Force have brought considerable benefit to British industry. Such collaborations must always be an option, as should the outright purchase of items of equipment unique within their class, such as the C17 Galaxy heavy-lift transporter.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence put it well in his speech on the defence estimates on 14 October, when he said:

"European industry must strengthen itself to face the competitive challenges that lie ahead . . . the Government want to give political support to changes in Europe that are industrially driven. Industrial logic should dictate the formation of industries in Europe, not political diktat."—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1996; Vol. 282, c. 486.]

Hear, hear, say I.

I only trust that OCCAR does not, over time, frustrate that commercially driven, competitive, anti-protectionist British policy, which, by and large, has secured the interests of the United Kingdom's defence industries and the needs of the United Kingdom's armed forces so well.

1.15 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) on securing a debate on a most important subject. The title of today's debate is something of a misnomer because what started as a proposal to create a Franco-German Armaments Agency has now changed. Instead, and because of the Government's decision to participate from an early stage, we are now equal partners in a four-nation armaments structure with France, Germany and Italy.

That initiative, for which a four-nation memorandum of understanding was signed on behalf of the United Kingdom by my noble Friend and ministerial colleague, Lord Howe, in Strasbourg on 12 November last year, represents an important opportunity for its participants. Increasing costs and falling resources have made greater efficiency in how we produce defence equipment essential. The initiative, if correctly managed, will be a means of collaborating more efficiently and effectively. Our membership is evidence of the United Kingdom's continued commitment to furthering European defence collaboration. European collaboration continues to be an important aspect of our procurement policy, and one which does not conflict with maintaining strong co-operative links with the United States.

The agency is now known by its acronym OCCAR. My hon. Friend brilliantly pronounced the French meaning of it, but in English it could well mean the Organisation for Collaboration and Co-operation in Armaments—I tend to cheat. Through our membership, it will pursue value for money and maximum competition in defence procurement. It clearly makes no sense to continue those past practices that have not been entirely successful, nor to create a new multinational structure for each collaborative project launched.

The establishment of the agency is an opportunity to create a centre of excellence—an organisation that will have at its disposal a portfolio of collaborative skills and techniques to provide the optimum procurement solution to the nation's purchasing requirements. We now have the prospect of harmonising the procurement policies of the four major western European arms producers. Success will mean better collaborative ventures.

The United Kingdom actively pursues defence equipment collaboration with our European allies and the United States when collaboration satisfies our military requirements and provides value for money. Membership of the four-nation agency represents no change in the

[Mr. James Arbuthnot]

United Kingdom's procurement policy. There is no suggestion of any move toward European preference policies. My responsibility is to deliver cost-effectively to this country's armed services the battle-winning equipment that they need and deserve.

The majority of UK collaborations are with our major European partners, because this recognises that effective collaboration is most easily achieved by partnership of equals or near equals. Nevertheless, given the capabilities and competitiveness of the United States industry, some equipment will and should be procured from the United States. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood was right to insist that co-operation with the United States should continue to be a significant factor in this country's defence procurement plans.

Not surprisingly, the Government's view is that the best way—probably the only way—to guarantee the worldwide success of the British defence industry is to ensure that it is competitive. To gain the full benefits of competition, it is vital for industry to compete in the world market—allowing itself and its products to measure up against the best—and to win. European preference policies simply do not allow industry to do so. We need to encourage open international markets. It is in our interests to reap the rewards of competition, of technological innovation, and of better products that represent true value for money.

On average, each year my Department spends about £800 million on co-operative projects. Germany, France and Italy are our major European partners. They are also the nations which, with the UK, make up the bulk of the European industrial base. Working together in the OCCAR creates potential for significant cost and efficiency benefits.

The United Kingdom is a committed and reliable collaborative partner, with a long history of defence procurement collaboration. We are the major partner in the Tornado project, the most successful European collaborative venture to date with about 1,000 aircraft ordered. We are playing a leading role in a range of important projects in western Europe which will provide our armed forces with some of the next generation of equipment.

However, if collaborative programmes are to offer our armed services the equipment that they need, equipment which is affordable and able to compete in the world market, we must improve on past performance. The UK's involvement in the new initiative from an early stage has allowed us to participate fully in the organisation's development and subsequent operation. Our aim has been to set up an organisation that follows best procurement practice; one that adds value, not bureaucracy; one that will lead to effective collaborative ventures, producing top-quality equipment in a way that is cost-effective for the taxpayer. I believe that our partners share that vision.

We need to adopt a more commercial approach when establishing future co-operative programmes and their supporting structures. We need to avoid wasteful practices that only distort the market and reduce the economic benefits to be derived. In the past, the obvious benefits of co-operation—increased standardisation, interoperability, shared development costs, longer production runs and reduced unit costs—have been dissipated by working practices antipathetic to efficiency and effectiveness. The juste retour principle, for example, only frustrates a truly competitive environment.

We should not procure from suppliers simply because they are allocated an element of a country's work share; effectiveness and competitiveness must first be proven. We cannot subsidise unnecessary duplication of facilities to satisfy purely national, rather than economic, needs. We should look to taut commercial management, preferably with responsibility for the co-ordination and delivery of the programme to time and cost, vested in a single prime contractor. We do not want—we can no longer afford—the overhead expense of large multinational project offices second-guessing industry and complicating the contractual relationship with the supplier. We want lean organisations with no international duplication of staffing.

The potential for improving efficiency in co-operative endeavours sits well with any responsible Government keen to maximise value for money from their expenditures and to give their service personnel the equipment that they need to do their job effectively. The OCCAR offers a channel for a worthwhile and meaningful coalescence of view and practice.

Procurement decisions can be a powerful tool in shaping the defence industrial base, although industry must be in the forefront if commercially viable companies are to be promoted. Governments must first remove the obstacles, especially in terms of ownership. There is a great deal to be done if the European defence industry is to be placed on a rational footing, and we cannot be complacent. If European defence projects are to be successful, we must have successful European companies to deliver them. That will be difficult, if not impossible, if nations always put their own short-term interests first. We hope and expect that the experience of working together in the agency will offer encouragement to European industry to seek ways to reorganise and restructure itself.

When the four major European defence industrial players come together in this way, there is significant opportunity for improvements to the collaborative process. The agency will be run on two levels: a board of supervisors, formed by the national armaments directors of each nation, where decisions must be unanimous, and an executive level, running day-to-day operations. The organisation's senior management reflects its quadrilateral nature. A Frenchman, Mr. Prevot, is the first to fill the director's post and his current deputy is German. There are two divisional leader posts; the UK will head the procurement and finance division and Italy the future programmes division.

The agency's board of supervisors met for the first time on 4 February 1997 to launch the organisation officially. The agency is now able to deal, formally, with the management of collaborative programmes. The agency is in the process of developing detailed procurement and programme management procedures for the programmes that it will run.

The UK envisages a policy that allows for flexibility of approach across a range of programmes. The promise offered by the harmonisation of the procurement policies

of Europe's four largest arms producers is considerable and, although I do not underestimate the difficulties ahead, it is an object well worth pursuing. The participants have already made some progress by agreeing that procurement should be based on competition and that rigid work share related simply to a nation's financial contribution, not its industry's competitiveness, should be a thing of the past.

A range of collaborative programmes with UK involvement is being considered for the new agency. The existing Franco-German-UK COBRA—counter battery radar—programme may be our first programme to be managed within the new structure. We intend the multi-role armoured vehicle programme to be managed by the quadrilateral agency. If chosen to meet our operational requirements for satellite communications, the TRIMILSATCOM programme has also been identified as a candidate for management under the new structure.

On the practical front, a great deal of work continues on establishing and developing the structure of the organisation and its working rules. There is much to be gained from establishing commonly understood and accepted approaches to programme management, contract principles and law, financial management arrangements and all the other practicalities involved in collaborative programmes. A common "stock" of principles, practices and staff to be drawn on as new collaborative ventures are set up offers the prospect of economies in time and money.

The organisation currently has eight staff, with one from the UK, and nations are considering plans to expand the staff to a maximum of 30 by the end of 1997. The UK will contribute five personnel, Italy will also contribute five and France and Germany will contribute 10 personnel each.

At this stage fixed staffing levels cannot be quantified, as they will depend on the number of programmes managed in the agency. Nations will review progress annually. Staff costs, in terms of pay and allowances, will, at least initially, be a national liability. Other administrative costs are to be divided between the four partners, with France and Germany shouldering 33.3 per cent. each of total costs, while the UK and Italy contribute 16.7 per cent. each. The initial UK financial contribution is estimated at about £400,000 for the first year. That will cover the costs of UK manpower as well as a share of the building and administrative costs, including setting-up costs.

Legal status is being pursued for the new structure. The various options to achieve it are currently being investigated, and one possible means of achieving it—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

M80 (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth)

1.30 pm

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): I am most grateful for having secured this Adjournment debate. The M80 extension between Stepps and Haggs is crucial to my constituents, and I want to set out why I believe that the decision to route the motorway through the urban part of my constituency is wrong.

I have today received a letter from the Minister setting out many of the issues in detail. It was most courteous of him to write to me before today's debate—I appreciate it very much.

I have a long history of involvement with this issue. In 1983, I became the Member of Parliament for the new constituency of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, having been the Member for Cumbernauld since 1979. At that time it formed part of east Dunbartonshire. The issue had been live even before then; I inherited an assumption that the road would pass along the A80. But circumstances since have changed radically.

The proposed motorway is of six lanes, with hard shoulders and a central reservation. The motorway envisaged in 1979 was an upgrade to the standard of the M80 between Haggs and Dunblane, or a—more recently constructed—motorway extension between the Townhead interchange and Stepps.

A decision had been taken before 1979 to develop housing, industry and recreation to the north and west of the A80, and to bring on new developments to the south and south-east of the A80 at Condorrat. That housing and that industry have since come into being and are in place. So those of us—there were many besides me—who had been content with an upgrade were faced with a new and different situation. I grew increasingly worried about what might happen and I tried, largely in vain, to raise the profile of the issue.

As the Minister will know, I tabled many parliamentary questions over the years, particularly at the start of each parliamentary Session, in an endeavour to find out how we stood. It was clear that the Government, too, would have to look again at their position; this they did in the light of developments. Their preferred option was the Kelvin valley option. I shared that view, as I still do.

I shared that view with Strathclyde regional council, the largest roads authority in the country at the time. I shared that view with Cumbernauld and Kilsyth district council. I shared it with almost all local councillors—I believe that only two of them dissented from the consensus. I shared that view with political allies and opponents alike. I share it with Cumbernauld development corporation. I share it with community councils. I share the view expressed by North Lanarkshire council, the current roads authority.

Once the Government had finally made up their mind, I had no option but to say where I stood. I stand in total opposition to the construction of the motorway through Cumbernauld. It will blight some 2,500 households. It will place at risk the inward investment and the jobs that go with that investment in the industrial area on the Mollinsburn to Condorrat corridor. Those jobs were hard won in the teeth of international competition; they are jobs for my constituents and for people from the surrounding area.

The motorway will place at risk the major distributive industries that we have won because of Cumbernauld's untrammelled access to the motorway system. Those industries include Transhield and Storeshield, which are responsible for distributing in Scotland, Northern Ireland and part of the north of England all the goods that can be purchased from Marks and Spencer stores. Curry's is also located in Cumbernauld, as is the Co-op. Their case for being in Cumbernauld has to do with its location and, as I have said, the town's untrammelled access to the motorway system.

The motorway will pollute the town. It will damage heritage sites at Mollins and Castlecary. It will damage the landscape at Mollinsburn and Castlecary glen. The disruption will be horrendous, both for Cumbernauld and for Kilsyth, Croy and Queenzieburn. Kilsyth will be disrupted all along the length of the Stirling road. I do not think that that road, at Kilsyth, will cope, either as a structure or with the congestion. Even the buildings in that part of Kilsyth will be adversely affected.

The pollution in Kilsyth during the years of construction will be appalling. I must tell the Minister and the people of Kilsyth—a great deal of misinformation is being put out on this subject—that I do not believe that there will be any gain from the Government's decision for the town of Kilsyth. What is more, the economy of Scotland will be affected if a main artery of communication is continually congested for years to come.

I accept that no one wants a motorway anywhere. I understand and respect the integrity of those such as Care 80 and the Friends of the Kelvin Valley who have sought to offer other proposals. But in common with all the authorities I accept the need for the completion of the motorway network. We are now long past the stage of other proposals, lines of route or alternatives.

The Government have made their choice of route. The Minister has been helpful in keeping me advised as to the procedures involved, and I understand that the orders will be laid later this year for the construction of the motorway, for purchasing the land, and so on.

I have been less than happy with the way public policy in this matter has been influenced, not least by quangos and other organisations loosely described as voluntary organisations. I understand the role of Scottish Natural Heritage, although I question its view. I am grateful to Mr. Magnus Magnusson, the chairman, who ensured that I was properly advised of that body's position when he and SNH made a presentation of their work to Members of Parliament here at Westminster two weeks ago. It was extremely helpful.

I have written to the Secretary of State about the role of the Scottish Wildlife Trust. That organisation received large sums of public money, most notably from Cumbernauld development corporation. The trust's annual report and accounts for 1996 show an entry "Cumbernauld endowment—£930,868." The trust has stewardship of land formerly held by Cumbernauld development corporation, including Seafar forest which will be badly disturbed and badly affected by the A80 upgrade, if it proceeds.

I am less than satisfied with the role played by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. I am uneasy about the trust's high profile and highly partial style in influencing the decision. I believe that its activities have contributed to creating a divide among the people in my constituency that is less

than helpful. My further actions in relation to the Scottish Wildlife Trust will depend on the Secretary of State's response to my letter. I do not expect the Minister to respond to that today.

Along with my constituents, I recognise that we must deal with the situation as it exists. I have therefore written to the Government asking that I be advised about the detail of the procedure to be followed. My constituents must be properly advised as to their rights. I have asked to be advised about who constitutes a bona fide objector; what is a bona fide objection; when the orders will be laid; and the steps to be taken thereafter.

I want to stop the motorway being built, and I know that that is what the overwhelming majority of my constituents in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth want. I shall continue to represent what I believe to be the best case for the well-being of my constituents in what remains of this Parliament, and I hope in the next. In challenging the Government's decision and seeking a public inquiry, I know that I speak for the majority of my constituents, whose concerns and anxieties over the matter are well founded.

1.41 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) on his success in obtaining the debate, and on giving us the opportunity to discuss our proposals. I am glad to see so many other right hon. and hon. Members in the Chamber—the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), and the hon. Members for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) and for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith). It occurs to me that, had the decision gone the other way, I would have had to reply to the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden.

We looked into the matter as objectively as we could and weighed up all the arguments. We believed that it was essential to make a decision. It may help the House if I explain that the intention is to publish and lay the orders in May. They should be ready at that time.

The road is one of Scotland's most important inter-urban and longer-distance trade links. It is also one of the busiest. Traffic congestion is the norm during the morning and evening peaks. The road carriageway is more than 30 years old, and disruption during essential road maintenance can cause severe problems. The result is that the route has become a bottleneck. Problems on the A80 produce knock-on effects elsewhere and can reduce the performance of a large part of the Scottish strategic network.

There is a clear consensus that action is required. The busiest section of the road routinely carries around 70,000 vehicles a day, which is well above its efficient capacity. Future growth will exacerbate the problem. We believe that an upgrading to full motorway standard with additional capacity is essential. The Government's private finance initiative is giving us the means to bring the scheme forward soon. The key question is the choice of the route for the eastern section.

I have listened with interest to the concerns expressed about the choice of the preferred line. A series of studies into route options was carried out over the past 10 years. The choice came down to a line north of Cumbernauld—the Kelvin valley route—and the widening of the existing A80.

There are strong arguments for and against each option, but the differences in cost and economic performance between the options are not significant. The main debate therefore centred around the environmental effects. Opposition to the Kelvin valley route is a reflection of the value placed by the wider community on the quality of the countryside and its landscape, flora and fauna. The concerns about the A80 upgrading are equally understandable. There is proper concern about the impact on the people and property likely to be directly affected. The potential for delay and disruption during construction is a major issue for the thousands of people who use the route every day.

We have consulted widely on the issue. Our choice has been made on the basis that we can mitigate against the adverse environmental impacts of the A80 widening. The Kelvin valley impacts, by contrast, would have a much longer-term effect.

Given the difficult environmental issues involved, we embarked on an extensive public consultation exercise before identifying our route preference. That involved a number of steps. The first was a series of round-table discussions with local interest groups, local authorities and other bodies. Local exhibitions and workshops for the public were then held at four locations in the area. The process culminated in a consultation forum during which all the consultees presented their views through their chosen delegate.

There is no doubting the strong views held for and against each option. The report on the process emphasised the willingness of the local people to listen to those with opposing views and to debate the matter in a constructive manner.

We did not expect a consensus view as a result of our consultations. Views are too polarised for that to be a realistic aspiration. However, we wanted to enable all those with an interest to feed their views into the assessment procedure. We now have a clear understanding of the issues of real concern. Armed with that information, we identified a preferred option and we can now focus on addressing those issues in the development of our proposals.

The major concern about the Kelvin valley route was the effect on the rural environment. The route presents a severe threat to over 20 ecologically significant sites. It would damage the remains of Antonine's wall and it would affect the environs of the Forth and Clyde canal—a waterway of great recreational potential. As the House will be aware, British Waterways received support to the value of £35 million from the millennium fund to regenerate the canal corridor. The Kelvin valley section of the canal is considered to be the most attractive on the whole route.

The impact on the wider landscape would also be severe. The scale of the road and its earthworks and structures would have a major impact on the rural character of the landscape, as would the traffic on the road. There would also be impacts on communities within the Kelvin valley. The route would affect a large number of farms and rural properties and would cause intrusion on the fringes of Kilsyth, Banton and other communities.

Lastly, the A80 would remain a very busy road. Over 20,000 vehicles a day would continue to use it and the result would be two major parallel roads within a narrow corridor.

[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton]

Careful design and appropriate mitigation measures would, in our view, limit the adverse impact. A great deal of effort has been made in that regard, but many effects would be permanent.

Three main concerns connected with the A80 route were emphasised during our consultations: disruption during construction, safety, and quality of life.

The construction of the route is likely to take more than three years. In view of the delays and disruption during even short-term maintenance on the route, many find that an appalling prospect. Long queues are feared on the main road. Of possibly greater concern is the temptation for drivers to divert to unsuitable local roads. Construction noise and dust are inevitable.

Safety is also an issue. Major roadworks have a poorer safety record than unrestricted sections of road. Diversion to unsuitable routes has clear safety implications. The novel design solution at Castlecary viaduct could cause dangers if inadequately signed. Impacts on properties adjacent to the road including land loss, noise and fumes, blight and reductions in property values are also matters of concern.

We understand those concerns and we have great sympathy for them, but they should not be exaggerated. They can be addressed, and they can be addressed with more success than the problems associated with the Kelvin valley. That conclusion lay at the heart of our choice.

The concern about the management of the construction process is a central issue. We are concluding the development of plans to ensure that traffic will be managed without undue delays and congestion during the construction period. If we had not been confident about that, we would not have been able to make the route choice that we have made. The proposals will be published in detail when we promote the scheme.

Widening a heavily trafficked road on-line is easier than carrying out on-line maintenance. The extra lanes being built can be used to accommodate the flow of traffic. Concrete barriers allow construction to take place safely, cheek by jowl with the live carriageway. Provision was made for future widening when the existing road was built in the 1960s. The wide central reservations and verges will allow for the necessary flexibility in construction and will accommodate a large part of the widened road.

The private finance initiative is an ideal contract strategy for such schemes. We will be able to specify the level of service on the road and provide sound financial incentives to achieve that. It will be a prerequisite that two lanes are maintained in each direction in all but exceptional circumstances during the construction.

It has been suggested that a public local inquiry should be held to consider our proposal. For a scheme of this size, a public inquiry is inevitable. Under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, any objections from affected landowners or statutory consultees would require the Secretary of State to hold an inquiry. As the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth has made clear, we would also hold an inquiry if we had significant objections from others. However, before an inquiry can be called, we require to publish our proposals in detail and to provide sufficient information to enable the public and the relevant consultees to take an informed view. That is the next step in the process.

During maintenance on the A80, regular travellers divert on to the A803 and roads through the residential parts of Cumbernauld. That is primarily because maintenance work on the existing road reduces the carriageway to a single lane in one or both directions, with long queues as a result. The construction method for widening will keep two lanes open in each direction and thus avoid that major problem, but some people will still be tempted to divert. A strategy is therefore required to ensure that that will not be a significant issue.

Surveys are being carried out during the on-going maintenance works. Any undesirable diversion of traffic from the A80 to other routes will be identified. Signing, traffic calming and possibly even access restrictions will be discussed with the local roads authority to limit such diversions during the upgrading work.

The safety of the novel solution of taking the road under the Castlecary viaduct by dividing the carriageways has been very carefully addressed. The design, which is fully in accordance with national design standards, is a considerable improvement on the present substandard layout. It will be well signed and the running lanes will diverge gradually so that the layout is clear to drivers. Greatly enhanced protection of the viaduct piers will be provided by concrete barriers. The design principles have been endorsed by the traffic police and safety audit teams and the detailed design will be subject to rigorous scrutiny by them. That idea will save much taxpayers' money and greatly reduce the environmental impact of the road on Castlecary glen.

An obvious concern to people who live adjacent to the existing road is its physical impact on their properties and any increase in traffic noise or reduction in air quality. There is scope to reduce noise levels at properties adjacent to the widened road by providing earth screening bunds where space is available, or noise barriers where space is more limited. Those will cut traffic noise very effectively. For the majority of properties in the corridor, there will be no increase in noise. Indeed, far from increasing noise, in many cases, there may be a reduction. A bund or fence will also reduce the visual intrusion of the road and traffic and the effect will be further softened by tree planting and other landscaping.

Air pollution from vehicle exhausts is also set to reduce significantly as increasingly stringent emission standards begin to bite. The important factor in this case is that the pollution from free-flowing motorway traffic will be much lower than the pollution from the congested and deteriorating conditions of the existing route. The on-line upgrading may not remove the traffic from the route, but the proposals will mitigate many of the adverse effects of the traffic and thereby make life better for many people.

Congestion on the A80 is increasingly affecting day-to-day business activity in Cumbernauld and is reducing the attractiveness of the town to investors. I am convinced that having direct access to the new motorway can make things only better. During construction, ensuring that two lanes of traffic are maintained in each direction throughout the working day will limit any adverse effects on Cumbernauld businesses and on the high proportion of long-distance commercial traffic on the route. Given our confidence that we can manage the

traffic during construction, the impact on the distribution business that is centred in Cumbernauld should also be manageable.

The detailed proposals for the preferred route are being worked up. An environmental statement is also being prepared to explain in detail what the environmental effects will be, both positive and negative. When the plans are finalised, public exhibitions will be arranged to provide the necessary information to all concerned. That will coincide with the forthcoming publication of the statutory orders. As I have said, I hope that that can be done in May. If there are significant objections to the route, a public local inquiry will be held, which is inevitable.

The upgrading of the A80 is a vital scheme within the trunk road programme. It will be one of the final links in the central Scotland motorway network and will bring enormous benefits to the whole of Scotland. We are committed to delivering those benefits. Doing nothing could also bring its environmental problems.

In taking forward the construction of the new motorway, we want to ensure that the impact of the new road on the community that borders it—and the impacts during construction—will be reduced to the minimum level practical. If we did not believe that the impacts could be contained, we would not have adopted widening as the preferred option.

I understand and sympathise with many of the concerns that have been expressed today, but our strategy is bold and ambitious. We intend to improve the road, minimise intrusion on the community and protect the environment. I look forward to working with all interested parties to those ends.

Concern has been expressed about the proposals' impact on property values. As we would all expect, anyone who has land or property acquired by compulsory purchase will be compensated fully. The Land Compensation (Scotland) Act 1973 also provides for compensation where the value of a property is affected by noise, fumes or dust from the new road, and claims for that can be submitted up to six years after the new road comes into use. Noise insulation grants are available to home owners when the noise rises above a certain level. Where properties will be acquired in due course for the new road, they are usually impossible to sell, and where owners wish to move, there exist powers to buy in advance.

Where houses are not to be acquired, but are severely affected by the new road, there are discretionary powers to purchase, but, as I have said, our aim is to minimise the number of people who will be adversely affected and the net result of the proposals should be an improvement on the present effects of the A80 for most people.

The existing A80 forms a substantial barrier in the communities of Muirhead and Moodiesburn, with their at-grade junctions and frontage access, due to the heavy traffic flows. The new road bypasses those communities to the north, with a substantial reduction in severance. The remaining two thirds of the route lie through the new town of Cumbernauld, which was designed around it and which incorporates grade-separated junctions and frequent bridge crossings. All those existing crossings will be rebuilt as part of the proposals and there will be no increase in severance as a result.

I congratulate the hon. Members for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth and for Strathkelvin and Bearsden on the thorough way in which they have represented their case on behalf of their constituents. The further examination of this will of course be for public local inquiry. I also express thanks to the communities concerned for having put their case reasonably and clearly, which has made our job easier in the roads department. We believe that we have considered their representations as objectively as possible.

It being two minutes to Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Lockerbie

1. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the letter of the Lord Advocate to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 14 February, by whom the allegations were considered and the conclusions drawn that proof of the Scottish case against the two accused Libyans did not depend on evidence that Mr. Thurman might give. [17299]

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): The allegations concerning Mr. Thurman are a matter for the United States authorities. I am advised that the United States inspector general's report, after investigation of the allegations, has not yet been published. When the American allegations became known, Mr. Thurman's role in the Lockerbie case was considered by the then Lord Advocate, Lord Rodger of Earlsferry. As long ago as October 1995, he advised the hon. Gentleman that proof of the Lockerbie case does not depend on evidence that Mr. Thurman might give.

Mr. Dalyell: Now we know that the Crown Office has slavishly followed information from the United States. At the time, did the Americans know that Mr. Thurman would be accused and lose his job for having fabricated forensic evidence? If it was not Mr. Thurman, who was it?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Obviously, the Law Officers are well aware of the allegations. However, the report has not been published, and it would be wrong to prejudge its outcome. I repeat what I have already said: the Lord Advocate has never suggested that Mr. Thurman did not play a significant part in the investigation. The Lord Advocate and his predecessor have chosen their words carefully in saying that the case does not depend on evidence that Mr. Thurman might give.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that those who live in Lockerbie or, like me, near it firmly believe that the investigations conducted by the Dumfries and Galloway police, the procurator fiscal and the Lord Advocate show that the alleged criminals in Libya must be brought to book in a court in Scotland or the United States, and that diversions to other possible suspects only cause harm?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I agree with my right hon. Friend. I was at Lockerbie literally within hours of the tragedy and atrocity. I believe that the Law Officers would not have brought forward the accusations if they had not been based on very strong evidence.

Dr. Godman: Despite the excellent work done by the police force mentioned by the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) and the Prime Minister's acknowledgement to me, some months ago, that any such trial will be held in Scotland and not in America, when will the Minister admit that it is highly unlikely that any such trial will take place at the High Court in Edinburgh? Almost nine years have passed since the terrible affair at Lockerbie, yet we are no nearer to bringing the culprits to trial. Why have the Government failed so signally in the matter?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Those issues could well be addressed to the Libyan Government. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), made it clear at the Dispatch Box last Friday that we should look to the Libyan Government to assist with the investigation. He went on to say:

"Libya's record of state sponsorship of terrorism is, rightly, a matter of deep and abiding concern."—[*Official Report*, 28 February 1997; Vol. 291, c. 603.]

I reject arguments for a third-country trial for the case, which could suggest that a trial in Scotland or the United States would not be fair. We cannot allow alleged terrorists to determine where they are tried.

Mr. John Marshall: Everyone agrees that the Lockerbie disaster was a great human tragedy. Is it not incumbent on hon. Members to congratulate the Scottish police on their investigation, to emphasise that Scottish justice would be even-handed between the alleged criminals and the forces of law, and to condemn those in the House who act as apologists for the evil terrorists of Libya?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have confidence in the Scottish system of criminal justice, which is one of the best in the world. I do not believe that attempts to have a trial elsewhere in Europe would succeed. The Libyans have given no indication that they would co-operate with such attempts.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the reply, I shall try to get my 11th Adjournment debate on the subject.

EU Committee of the Regions

2. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy in respect of Scottish representation on the European Union Committee of the Regions. [17314]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): Scotland is well represented on the European Union Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Booth: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Labour party's proposals for Scotland would reduce a proud and fine nation to a mere region in the European Union?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. The shadow Foreign Secretary has made it clear that a Scottish Parliament would be represented by someone with observer status at the Council of Ministers, meaning that Scotland's fishermen and farmers would no longer be represented by a Secretary of State able to speak for the whole United Kingdom.

Dr. Reid: The Secretary of State will be aware that many areas of Scotland benefit from European Union

objective 2 funding, which is due to be revised in the next 12 months. Will he assure us that he will give what support he can to the alliance that has been formed to ensure continuing objective 2 funding for areas in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom that have been badly affected by the decline in the steel or coal industries, or that are liable to be affected by a decline in the defence industries and are eligible for Konver funding?

Mr. Forsyth: I am most grateful for the hon. Gentleman's confirmation that he thinks that I shall be here in 12 months to conduct the negotiations. I am happy to give him the assurance that he seeks. We had a good Highlands and Islands Convention meeting on Monday in Stornoway, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), at which we discussed how to tackle objective 1 status.

The hon. Gentleman's comments about objective 2 are also true. It is important to have a united and firm front in the negotiations, which are not about getting money from Europe but about getting our money back from Europe, because we are net contributors.

Mr. Stewart: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, under the present system, Scottish Office Ministers sometimes lead United Kingdom delegations to the Council of Ministers? Does that not underline the significance of the downgrading to observer status proposed by the Labour party?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. At the most recent Agriculture Council, my noble Friend the Earl of Lindsay spoke and led for the United Kingdom. Given that the two common European policies that we have relate to fisheries and agriculture, which are both important to Scotland, it seems an act of sheer crass stupidity to abandon having a strong voice for Scotland in Europe on issues on which the prosperity of our rural areas and our fishing communities depend.

Mr. Wallace: Does the Secretary of State agree that the efforts of hon. Members of all parties to represent Scotland's interests in the Committee of the Regions are undermined by the shambles of the Government's European policy, not least their equivocation on a single European currency? How does he respond to the alarm bells rung by Locate in Scotland earlier this year, which suggested that there was growing anecdotal evidence, particularly from Japanese inward investors, of concern about the level of debate and the equivocation about Britain's future role in Europe? The Secretary of State is a leading arch Euro-sceptic. Are not his policies and the attitudes towards the European Union that he supports more damaging for the future of the Scottish economy than any of the issues of constitutional change about which he talks?

Mr. Forsyth: It would be wrong for me to comment on leaked documents, but, as the hon. Gentleman is relying on a report from a Scottish newspaper, I had better set the record straight. The said document, which I have studied, makes no reference to economic and monetary union, but it does warn about the dangers of the social chapter to our competitiveness and our ability to attract inward investment. I have a feeling that the hon. Gentleman will not refer too much to that document in future, as he and the crowd opposite are committed to saddling Scotland with the millstone of involvement in the European social chapter, which would put it at a disadvantage when attracting inward investment.

The hon. Gentleman represents the party that would do most to fragment our country into regions in a Europe of the regions. It is committed to a European super-state, and the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will be sent packing at the election as a result of those irresponsible policies.

Mr. Marlow: My right hon. Friend will no doubt be aware of recent press reports that money is made available through the Committee of the Regions to be spent in Scotland on promoting the cause of the so-called euro. Will my right hon. Friend look into the matter and ensure that that does not happen?

Mr. Forsyth: As a general principle, I believe that public money should be spent sensibly. I am not sure that it would be particularly wise to commit any money to that expenditure at present, as public expenditure could be spent more wisely in many other areas. I certainly wish to see resources used where they will be most effective and most directly relevant to the prosperity of the people of Scotland. This project does not seem to be consistent with that requirement.

Council Tax

3. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the expected levels of council tax for 1997–98. [17315]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): Council tax levels will depend on the decisions of individual councils.

Sir David Steel: I thank the Minister for that blinding flash of insight into the financial affairs of Scotland. I seriously thank him and the Secretary of State for Scotland for the courteous hearing that they gave to me and to my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) in Selkirk, and for rearranging the capping limit for the Scottish Borders council. However, will the Minister accept that new money is not coming from the Government to the council, but that the council is simply being allowed to raise council tax, to mitigate the worst effects of the Government's starvation of local council funds? Does he recognise that, when the Borders council meets tomorrow to make unacceptable cuts, it will also have to make an unacceptable increase in council tax—all of which adds up to a Tory tax?

Mr. Kynoch: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for at least being big enough to be thankful for the fact that my right hon. Friend and I listened to his lobbying on behalf of the Borders council. I was surprised that his colleague the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) did not mention that in yesterday's debate. At its request, the Scottish Borders council has the flexibility to spend an extra £924,000.

The council's budget proposals, if no capping was in place, would have increased council tax by 48 per cent. The right hon. Gentleman talks about "unacceptable"

increases in council tax, but the local Liberal Democrat administration wanted to increase council tax even more than that. The right hon. Gentleman must realise that the local government settlement is more than fair, and that councils must act responsibly and ensure good value for money in service provision to council tax payers.

Mr. Gallie: Is my hon. Friend aware that residents in south Ayrshire are absolutely delighted that South Ayrshire council has received an above inflation rate grant this year? Does he agree that there should be an element of optimism—*[Interruption.]* Well, perhaps not when it is a Labour council. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is cause for some optimism that the council could hold the council tax rate this year?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend works on the same principle as I do. A reasonable settlement that allows South Ayrshire council to increase its expenditure next year by £3.5 million, or 3.21 per cent., should be more than adequate to maintain the level of services and to improve them. My hon. Friend is right: the Labour administration, with the level of cuts that it apparently wants to make, has sought an increase in spending of 7.7 per cent. If the council were to have that spending power, it would have to increase the council tax for my hon. Friend's constituents by 27 per cent. That is what the Labour party is like when it is in power: that is the Labour party in local government in Scotland. The Labour party wants a tax-raising parliament in Scotland. It wants to increase the level of government in Scotland, and to increase spending and taxation. That is the Labour party that we all know still exists.

Mr. George Robertson: Everyone will notice that, once again, the Secretary of State dodges the column and fails to defend the Government's record on local government. Does the Minister realise how much real anger there is in Scotland about the level of council tax increases and the cuts in education, all of which are the Government's responsibility? Why do the Government continue to pretend that extra money is available, when they have put extra burdens on councils? They know that the cost of the gerrymandered reorganisation of local government, for which they were responsible, makes a mockery of their claims about extra money.

The Government have only a few more weeks left on their deathbed. Why do they not repent, and put some of the money that they are holding back for pre-election gimmicks where the people of Scotland want it—into the education of our children?

Mr. Kynoch: Yesterday, the hon. Gentleman used the excuse that he had been stuck on an aeroplane at Glasgow airport for his poor performance at the Dispatch Box. I am not sure what his excuse is today. He implied that the Government will not be re-elected, so I assume that he thinks that his party will be elected. Given that he is critical of this year's local government settlement, he should tell the Scottish people whether he believes that more money should be given to local government, how much and from where. I asked those questions time and again yesterday, but I received no answers. I ask the hon. Gentleman again this afternoon, and I hope that he will tell the Scottish public the answer.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my hon. Friend agree that council tax rises by the Labour party are due to its usual financial mismanagement? Is he aware of the deep frustration felt by my constituents down south in my English constituency of Sutton and Cheam, who, unlike the Scots, do not receive the generous 40 per cent. support from the Government?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the management of taxpayers' money. The difference between the Government and the Opposition is that we believe that we are the trustees of the taxpayer. I sometimes wonder whether the Opposition realise that central Government and local government funding comes from the taxpayer. I heartily agree with my hon. Friend that such mismanagement is a measure of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrat party. The sooner we get the election over and the Government are restored to power, the sooner we will get better value for money for the taxpayer.

King Kenneth III

4. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to mark the thousandth anniversary of the accession of King Kenneth III to the Scottish throne. [17316]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I see no reason to mark the anniversary of the accession of King Kenneth III, who came to the throne by the violent overthrow of Constantine III. As the only significant event of his reign was the loss of Lothian to the English, who were led by Ethelred the Unready, I am surprised by the hon. Gentleman's desire to honour him.

Mr. Home Robertson: The question was inspired by the Prime Minister's hallucinations about 1,000 years of British history. Is the Secretary of State aware that King Kenneth reigned fully 710 years before the Union with England? Is he further aware that King Kenneth lost his seat, so to speak, as a consequence of a rather drastic leadership challenge? I should warn the Secretary of State that such has been known to happen in the Stirling area. Would not the best recognition of 1,000 years of Scottish history and 300 years of British history be a modern constitution with a parliament for Scotland for the next millennium?

Mr. Forsyth: Perhaps I should remind the hon. Gentleman that it was Ethelred the Unready who won Lothian in the year in question. I know that the Labour party seems to have forgotten its principles and its history, but perhaps I should also remind the hon. Gentleman that the first person to talk about 1,000 years of history in the context of the British constitution was the late Hugh Gaitskell. During his speech to the Labour party conference in 1962, he warned of the dangers of a federal Europe and said:

> "It does mean, if this is the idea, the end of Britain as an independent European state . . . it means the end of a thousand years of history."

I advise Opposition Members to learn from their party's history and perhaps start putting principles before their narrow political interest and risking the integrity of our constitution.

Mr. Jessel: Did not the late Hugh Gaitskell insist that constitutional Bills should be taken on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Forsyth: It is correct that the late Hugh Gaitskell was a member of the Procedure Committee which in

1945 established the principle that constitutional matters should be taken in Committee on the Floor of the House. The fact that the Leader of the Opposition has placed that in doubt is a disgrace and a threat to the integrity of the House of Commons.

Mr. Canavan: What about King Kenneth I, otherwise known as Kenneth McAlpine of the same clan as Lord McAlpine, who spilled the beans about the Government's skulduggery and is now saying that the Tories must be defeated in the general election in order to clear their heads?

Mr. Forsyth: Perhaps I could remind the hon. Gentleman, who is a constituent of mine in Stirling, that I am the Member who represents Bannockburn. When the hon. Gentleman was the Member for part of my constituency, he fled the field because he was scared that he would lose.

Capital Challenge Fund

5. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the allocation of capital consents via the capital challenge fund for the financial year 1997–98. [17317]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has today announced full details of the central challenge fund winners. Nineteen bids have been successful in full or in part, with awards totalling £59 million.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am really, really grateful, but perhaps the Minister can put me out of my misery and tell me whether the Scottish Borders council's bid for Hawick has been approved. The bid was well put together and, more than anything else, it provided an opportunity for the health board's plan for a new community hospital and the local enterprise company under the new small towns initiative to come together to form a coherent and integrated approach to social and economic regeneration in the town of Hawick, which is very much needed. If the Minister is about to tell me that he has anticipated all this and has approved the Hawick bid, I will be really very grateful and thankful.

Mr. Kynoch: I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman was not grateful yesterday, and we made the announcement today. I am sorry to say that on this occasion the Hawick bid has not been successful. The good news for Hawick, as the hon. Gentleman is only too well aware, is that it is one of the pilots for the small towns initiative which was announced a little while ago. It will be up to the local enterprise company and Scottish Enterprise to discuss funding for the projects that are likely for Hawick.

All the bids for the challenge fund were of a high standard and all were judged carefully. Officials from the Scottish Office will be in touch with the local authority in Hawick to discuss how it can modify the bid and come back again for a future challenge fund competition and perhaps be successful.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that the people of North Tayside welcome the challenge fund decision. They welcome the fact that the Perth flood prevention scheme is being addressed, together with the subject of Andover primary school in Brechin, which comes within my constituency after the boundary changes. We welcome the news about Edzell. I have a personal interest in Edzell, because I was the chief flying instructor there many years ago. I am delighted that we are now making progress with developments in that area.

Mr. Kynoch: It never ceases to amaze me where my hon. Friend has been and what he has been involved in, but that is why he will be so successful in the general election.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for recognising the fact that Perth and Kinross council's bid for flood prevention works in Perth will be a major beneficiary of the challenge fund. The funding will cover five years, and that shows how the challenge fund bid process can benefit local authorities and enable them to undertake, for the benefit of council tax payers, larger projects than they can tackle under their normal allocations.

Mr. Chisholm: Perhaps the Minister can tell me whether the north Edinburgh bid from my constituency has been successful. How much has been taken out of capital consents to provide some slight reduction in the massive cuts that he has imposed on Scottish local authorities? Does the Minister still think that those cuts are imaginary, as he said yesterday, or is it just his fiddled figures and the so-called savings from local government reorganisation that are imaginary?

Mr. Kynoch: Edinburgh council will receive £7 million for the north Edinburgh project, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman welcomes that good news for the people in Granton and surrounding areas, who will receive significant benefits. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made his allocation for local authorities, he took full account of the provision for the capital challenge fund to put together a package that was fair and reasonable for local authorities.

The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) did not answer my question, so perhaps the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) will do so. The Labour party is critical and asks for more money, but how much more would it put into local authorities? At least, the hon. Member for Leith was honest with his party in Dundee when he told it—although he was embarrassed about it—that the Labour party would go into the general election campaign without committing itself to more funding. The hon. Gentleman cannot be his two-sided self, and refuse to come clean with the Scottish public and say that there will be no more money under Labour.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: In Perth and Kinross, we are grateful for the announcement today of £18.3 million for the Perth flood prevention scheme, but the Minister will be aware that there is still a shortfall of some £3.5 million on the bid. The rural flood prevention schemes still need £1 million. Six of those schemes are now ready to go ahead. When will the Minister make an announcement about borrowing consents for those schemes?

Mr. Kynoch: I am grateful that the hon. Lady has recognised that we have given something to the flood prevention proposal, because it is not so long since she

told me that, in her opinion, we would not give anything to the scheme. We will consider any application seriously, but some of the applications that she mentions have not yet reached the stage of being schemes. When they have, they will be considered.

Hospices

6. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representation he has received in respect of the document "The Scottish Health Service: Ready for the Future", with particular reference to the establishment of hospices as resource centres. [17318]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Our White Paper on the future of the Scottish health service has been generally well received. To date, there have been six representations about the initiative on hospices as resource centres. I have also met, at Dr. Gray's hospital, the local group campaigning for hospice provision and I am, and remain, sympathetic to its aims.

Mrs. Ewing: I thank the Minister for his extensive letter on the issue dated 3 March, which I received yesterday. Given his public support and the keen interest that has been expressed in Moray for the establishment of a day hospice, and remembering that the people with friends and family who are terminally ill have to travel to Inverness or Milltimber in Aberdeen, does he agree that—despite the fact that the pilot initiatives mentioned in the White Paper are building on existing hospices—there is a strong case for a hospice in Moray as a resource centre? It would cost only approximately £300,000 per annum and, given the groundswell of support, the generous inhabitants of Moray would contribute substantially to the cost.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am sympathetic to what the hon. Lady says. The initiative in the White Paper is aimed at existing adult voluntary hospices; it is meant to help them spread their expertise. I hope that the hospice campaign and the health board will be able to reach agreement about future services. They both recognise the fact that specialist palliative care for the people of Moray must be improved. We accept that the very best palliative care must be available for those suffering from cancer and other degenerative diseases.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: May I point out to the Minister the fact that the Marie Curie organisation runs the Huntershill hospital in Springburn, and works closely with the national health service? It also operates a house visiting service. Will the Minister give every support to that organisation, which does an excellent job throughout Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have the utmost admiration for the Marie Curie organisation and everything that it does in that sphere. We work alongside it and give it whatever moral support we can. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that we need to give more practical support, I would be grateful if he would let me know what possibilities he has in mind. We shall respond as positively as we can.

Income Tax

7. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the mechanisms for the introduction of a separate system of income taxation in Scotland. [17319]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A separate income tax system in Scotland would impose an unwelcome burden on taxpayers and employers, requiring a major change in employers' payrolls. It would place an administrative burden on companies with Scottish and English employees, and cost the typical Scottish family more than £6 per week in extra income tax.

Mr. Shaw: Will my right hon. Friend confirm the fact that the bureaucracy surrounding the administrative system for a tartan tax would mean incorporating names such as those of Scottish people who live in my constituency of Dover and Deal, those of English people in my constituency, and even those of Scottish Members of Parliament at Westminster—but that many of them would not pay tax unless they were caught by the 90-day or 183-day rule? Would not that massive bureaucracy have to be paid for out of a tax levied on Scottish pensioners?

Mr. Forsyth: I do not have a clue. I do not know what the costs would be; the people who propose the tax are not prepared to tell us. Certainly employers would have to have two sets of tax tables. Certainly the system would operate on the present residency rules, so Scottish Members of Parliament might be exempt from the tartan tax if they spent more than a certain number of days working outside Scotland. That might encourage many Scottish Opposition Members, especially Labour Members, to attend here more often. That is the only benefit that I can see. As for the bureaucracy, we know that when the previous Labour Government proposed to include such a tax under their Scotland Bill, they were advised by the Inland Revenue that it would take at least five years to put the necessary systems in place. Certainly the system would take time and would be expensive, and the cost would be borne by all taxpayers and all employers.

Mr. McAllion: Has the Secretary of State forgotten that he was the prime mover in introducing a separate poll tax for Scotland—a mad experiment that cost the taxpayer billions of pounds and had to be scrapped within five years? Perhaps he will explain to the House why he continually warns Scottish voters against giving a tax-raising power to a parliament that they would control, while leaving them at the mercy of 22 tax rises imposed by this Parliament, which by definition they can never control.

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman wants to mention 22 tax rises, he might also mention 25 tax reductions. As for his point about poll tax and income tax, if he does not understand the difference between poll tax and having different rates of income tax in different parts of the United Kingdom, I suggest that he has a word with the former leader of his party, Neil Kinnock, who warned that

as soon as we start introducing separate tax-raising parliaments in Britain, we begin the break-up of Britain. That is what Opposition Members are committed to.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Among all the things that, as my right hon. Friend has said, are not clear about the possibility of a mad tartan tax under a Labour Government, is not one thing clear—that the tax would be levied on Scottish pensioners? Should not we know whether any estimate has been made of how many of them would have to flee from Scotland to England to avoid that madcap tax?

Mr. Forsyth: I notice that Opposition Members find this funny. To be fair to the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), he has confirmed that Scottish pensioners would have to pay the tartan tax; they will get a smaller return on their savings than English pensioners, and people whose pensions have been earned in Scotland will be subject to an extra tax burden. I find it difficult to understand why people in Berwick should have a better return on their pension than people in North Berwick. I dare say that that might well result in people moving south of the border for their retirement. That is a particular wickedness of the policies proposed by Opposition Members.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Secretary of State agree that taxation should be uniform throughout the nation? Questions are being asked about the taxing powers of a devolved Administration, so will he bear it in mind that while the previous Northern Ireland Government had powers over death duties they refused to use them because that would have put them out of kilter with the rest of the nation? That was a Unionist Administration.

Mr. Forsyth: I entirely agree. It is certain that the exercise of separate income tax-raising powers is a threat to the unitary system. It is also the case, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned the Stormont model, that while Stormont was able to operate in a discrete range of areas—much narrower than is proposed for the Scottish Parliament with its tartan tax-raising power—the quid pro quo was a substantial reduction in representation in the House.

I can see no case at all that is in Scotland's interest that would result in a reduction of the number of Scottish Members of Parliament and the loss of the office of Secretary of State; it is this House that will determine the expenditure by a Scottish Parliament—expenditure that would be considerably greater than the amount spent in England.

The proposal threatens not only the prosperity of pensioners and working people in Scotland but our public services, because it would reduce our voice here at Westminster, where the key decisions are taken, and our ability to defend Scotland's interests.

Mr. Stewart: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the scandalous admission by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) that the tartan tax would be levied against health care provision shows the sick priorities of the Labour party? Should not its slogan be, "Vote Labour and put more politicians before patients?"

Mr. Forsyth: Not only people who have made private provision for health care will suffer: anyone who has a company car will pay more if it travels on Scottish roads or even if it crosses the border. That seems particularly inequitable. As the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has made it clear that there is no extra money, the costs of the Scottish Parliament—we estimate them at just under £80 million in the first year—will have to come out of health service, local government and other spending priorities. It is a nonsense proposal from a party that is prepared to put its own interests before those of the people.

Mr. McFall: In his 1992 election manifesto, the Secretary of State, in his modest way, said:

"Everyone knows someone who has been helped by Michael Forsyth."

Five years later, as a result of broken tax promises, everyone in Scotland knows someone who has been taxed 22 times over by the Government since 1992.

Is the Secretary of State proud of the fact that the constituents of the 10 Tory Members of Parliament have paid more than £500 million in extra taxes since 1992? Is not that the real tartan tax for the people of Scotland? Can we hope that the Secretary of State, in his last ministerial appearance at the Dispatch Box, will offer the electorate of Scotland one final apology for the 22 tax rises and for the Government's deception of the Scottish electorate in their tax promises in 1992?

Mr. Forsyth: The whole House will have noted that the hon. Gentleman has not been prepared to defend his party's policy of levying a tartan tax on the people of Scotland. The House knows that Labour Members have spent the whole of this Parliament complaining that the Government have not spent enough. That they have the cheek to stand, uniquely in Scotland, on a platform of raising an additional tartan tax, yet complain about taxation levels, beggars the imagination. The truth is that the Labour party takes its votes in Scotland for granted, which is why it wants, uniquely, to tax people in Scotland and not people in England or elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Wild Salmon

8. **Mr. Hawksley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the future of wild salmon in Scotland. [17320]

12. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the future of wild salmon in Scotland. [17324]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): The recent excellent report produced by Lord Nickson's task force on Scotland's salmon fisheries, subject to consultation, will form the basis of future Government policy in this important sector.

Mr. Hawksley: Has my hon. Friend any specific proposals to restrict the commercial netting of salmon, which seems to be one of the major causes of the reduction in numbers?

Mr. Robertson: My noble Friend's task force has approached the matter head on but, as my hon. Friend will

know, its findings are out for consultation, and I think it only right to wait until the end of that consultation before presenting specific proposals.

Mr. Garnier: Is my hon. Friend aware that, to celebrate the work of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Labour-controlled Glasgow city council is to spend a huge amount on red dye, which it will tip into the River Clyde? What will that do to reintroduce wild salmon into that great river? Does my hon. Friend agree that, whereas wild salmon is good to eat and is a source of much employment in Scotland, new Labour is simply slimy and pink?

Mr. Robertson: My noble Friend's task force was not asked specifically to look at the impact of red dye on salmon in the Clyde, but I am sure that, were its members to do so, they would be appalled—as are most people in Scotland—that Glasgow city council is considering spending up to half a million pounds of council tax payers' money on a ridiculous stunt.

Mr. Galbraith: Does the Minister agree that the laws and regulations relating to salmon are unduly influenced by unrepresentative landowning hereditary peers? Is it not right, therefore, that the next Labour Government will wipe them away, and that in future the laws on salmon will benefit everyone, not just landowning lackeys?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman has obviously not looked at the membership of the task force. There were no landowning hereditary peers on it. It represented all those in Scotland—and, indeed, beyond—who regularly fish for salmon and support the salmon industry.

Mr. Wilson: May I correct the Minister's last statement? The task force certainly did not represent all interests; as usual, the interests that were not represented were those of people who live in the communities where the ownership of salmon, and other natural resources, is in the hands of a tiny minority who are absurdly over-represented—and it is absurd that they are represented at all—in the other place.

When he considers his colleagues' questions, will the Minister recognise that one of the most spiteful and irrational campaigns undertaken by the Government in defence of the riparian owners' interests has been that against the historic industry of salmon netting in Scottish rural communities? How does he defend the fact that, to wipe out salmon netting in those communities, the Government have been prepared to give charitable status to a bogus organisation so that it can buy up the netting stations? They have been prepared to destroy the excellent industry of salmon netting in many parts of Scotland to give all the benefits to riparian owners and the angling interests that sell fishing rights in Scotland's salmon rivers for huge amounts.

Does not all that need reform, and is not getting rid of the unelected interests in the other place a major stepping stone towards rational legislation on such matters?

Mr. Robertson: "Spiteful" and "irrational" are not adjectives that I would use to describe my noble Friend's task force report, but I would use them to describe the hon. Gentleman. Once again, he has shown complete disregard for a proud industry that brings in thousands of jobs, tourists, other visitors and money to the most rural parts of Scotland, some of which are very fragile and depend on the very people whom he has castigated—and shame on him for so doing.

Health Service Funding

10. **Mr. Dover:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on planned funding levels for the national health service in Scotland. [17322]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government have increased spending on the Scottish health service in real terms every year in this Parliament, and are pledged to continue to do so for every year in the next Parliament—a pledge that the Labour party has not matched.

Mr. Dover: As my right hon. and learned Friend will know, 43 per cent. of general practitioners are fundholders. Does he agree that, if the Labour party implemented its doctrinaire policies, that would be bad for the national health service and for patient care throughout Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I certainly agree that GP fundholding has produced innovation and flexibility, and our White Paper builds on that. We want to introduce more electronic links to general practices to improve the information available to GPs and reduce the amount of paperwork, as well as develop the role of community hospitals and, above all, make services available as close as possible to patients' homes.

Mrs. Fyfe: Madam Speaker, I wonder whether your eye slipped past the question of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight). Many hon. Members would like to discuss the matter. If not, may I—

Madam Speaker: Order. If that question had been in order, I would have called it. It was unstarred. We are getting on with Question 10, on which the hon. Lady has been fortunate enough to be called.

Mrs. Fyfe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I had noticed that the hon. Member for Edgbaston was in the Chamber.

On the question tabled by the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover), does the Minister realise that if £1 million or more had not been paid to Mr. William Duff for ruining patients' teeth, there would have been £1 million more to spend on health care services in Greater Glasgow?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I agree that that dentist performed badly for his clients. I understand that some of them are suing him and that the matter will be properly resolved in the courts.

Mr. Nicholls: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of reports in the west country press this weekend that suggest that, in Scotland, it is possible to get on the national health a particularly high grade of blood plasma product that is not available to English health authorities? It is further suggested that Scottish health authorities get a specific grant to enable them to buy that product. I realise that he may not been able to answer today, but

if that is correct, does he agree that it is thoroughly unjustifiable, and yet another example of the fact that the Scots are already over-subsidised by English taxpayers?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am delighted by that question, because all party leaders in Scotland have given blood, as I did on the occasion of the Scottish Grand Committee meeting in Hamilton.

Mr. George Robertson: Blue blood?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I assure the hon. Gentleman that my blood is every bit as red as his.

Giving blood is a friendly and comfortable process that performs an invaluable role in saving lives throughout Scotland. I shall follow up my hon. Friend's remarks.

Mr. McAvoy: Is the Minister aware that the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), stated that the private finance initiative would not be used

"to extend private sector responsibility"—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 20 May 1996; c. 3.]

to the delivery of clinical services? If he is, does he remember his statement to the Scottish Grand Committee in Montrose on 17 February 1997, when he refused to rule out such involvement in clinical services? Who can we believe?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can tell the hon. Gentleman exactly. The scope of schemes has to be determined locally. If a different model of provision of a certain service is to be explored, that exploration must be agreed by local management and clinicians. It is not for the Scottish Office to bar that from happening. In all cases, services will still be specified, monitored and funded by the Scottish health service. Clinical care would remain free at the point of delivery and would be based on clinical need.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my right hon. and learned Friend believe that we are getting good value for money out of NHS managers in Scotland? Have they improved waiting lists and the throughput of patients? Has he calculated how many of those people will lose their jobs if Labour comes to power and takes money away from employing those managers to do their excellent work?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I agree with my hon. Friend that managers, as well as those at the sharp end of the health service, have an important role to play. Yesterday, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said that Labour would

"release £30 million for patient care by reducing the number of trust board members and cutting bureaucratic jobs."

We have pledged to increase health service funding by £148 million next year. That has not been matched by the Opposition. The number of whole-time equivalent staff in the health service in Scotland has increased by 21 per cent.—from 62,000 in 1980 to nearly 75,000 in 1995. If £30 million has to be removed from the trusts by mergers, how many hundreds of people will lose their jobs? Will they be psychologists, optometrists, doctors or nurses? Opposition Members cannot avoid the reality that they refuse to increase resources for the health service in real terms—possibly because they have plans for an extremely expensive parliament in Scotland, the cost of which might approach £80 million

Mr. George Robertson: May I confirm that we will match the extra money to be put into the health service next year by the Government and that, on top of that, we will make sure that the Government's obsession with administration and bureaucracy, which has characterised all that they have done in the past few years, will be reversed and that priority will be given to patient care? Is the Minister aware—and is he proud of the fact—that, since the NHS reorganisation in 1991, administration costs have spiralled by almost £190 million a year, and that the Government's obsession with bureaucracy has meant that patient care has taken second place? By reducing the number of NHS trusts, we will reverse that trend. We will move away from posh foyers, big cars and highly paid accountants and put the money that is freed into patient care, which is what the public want.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman has not given any pledge to increase funding in real terms for each year of the next Parliament. No Labour Front Bencher has done that. We have given such a commitment and it has not been matched. Every year from 1980 to 1995, the number of support staff in the Scottish health service has been reduced. It has fallen from 48,300 to 39,500. That shows that we have given top priority to patient care, and those at the sharp end. In the present year we have made certain that £14 million has been diverted from administration into patient care. Over and above that, the hon. Gentleman suggests a £30 million cut for NHS trusts. I am asking how many hundreds of jobs will be put at risk. I believe that many will be, and it is fair that the electorate should be warned about that before the threat can be put into action.

Teachers (Appraisal)

11. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to improve the appraisal system for teachers in Scotland. [17323]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Appraisal should be the basis for assuring teaching standards in Scottish schools. The present voluntary arrangements have resulted in too few teachers being appraised. My right hon. Friend and I have therefore decided that appraisal should be put on a statutory basis. Consultation on the draft regulations has begun and will be operational by the start of the new school session.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that the appraisal of teachers goes hand in hand with the testing of children? Has my hon. Friend noticed, in contrast to the positive proposals in the White Paper on the future of education in Scotland, the near hysteria of Opposition Members and their teaching union allies in opposing those policies? Does he agree that that shows that old Labour is still alive and kicking in some areas and that the tragedy is that it is to the detriment of children in Scotland?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is right. Our approach to appraisal of teaching, and testing in S1 and S2 in

secondary schools, is part of our continuing drive to push up even further standards in Scottish schools. That contrasts sharply with the attitude of Labour Members, whose answer to all this seems to be to close bad schools.

Mr. Welsh: When will the Minister respond to the 40,000 parents, children and teachers in Edinburgh and the 20,000 in Glasgow who demonstrated against the Government's education policy? Will he now appraise his mishandling of the education system? If he will not, the electorate certainly will.

Mr. Robertson: As I understand it, those people were demonstrating not against the Government's policy but against the spending decisions and expected spending decisions of local authorities. Every teacher on that march and every parent of every child in Scotland's schools should know that every local authority in Scotland has more money to spend next year on education than last year. We expect those local authorities to make education the same key priority as the Government have made it.

Sir Hector Monro: On the training of teachers, does my hon. Friend agree that the continuation of the assisted places scheme and the introduction of vouchers for nursery education are crucial for the future of Scottish education and that if the Labour party continues to object and say that those schemes will be abolished, it will continue to plummet down the polls as it did yesterday?

Mr. Robertson: Every parent in Scotland of a pre-school child should know what the Labour party intends to do this year, next year and the year after. It would snatch back the vouchers, worth £1,100, which we are issuing and allow parents to choose, for the first time, whether to send their child to a nursery in the private or local authority sector. We are empowering parents by giving them that money and if, God forbid, Labour was sitting on the Government Benches, it would snatch that money back.

Mrs. Liddell: Will the Minister acknowledge that the key to raising standards in Scottish schools is the excellent work done by Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools? Will he condemn the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), who claimed that school inspectors do not have proper jobs? Is not it hypocritical of Conservative Members to attack teachers when no action is taken against Conservative Members who pollute our schoolchildren with racism, sexism and bigotry?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Member who should be condemned is the hon. Lady who, two weeks ago, was briefing the press that the Government intended to privatise HMI. That was absolutely untrue. As always, the hon. Lady seeks to hector and lecture all involved in Scottish education with the attitude that granny knows best. That is why granny wants to snatch back £1,100 from the hands of parents in Scotland.

Secondary Education

13. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent per pupil in secondary schools in Scotland in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the figure in 1978–79, at constant prices. [17325]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Current expenditure per secondary pupil in 1994–95 was £2,874. That is 37 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1979.

Sir David Knox: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that that impressive increase in expenditure per secondary school pupil in Scotland has been reflected in improvements in the quality of education provided to them?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are putting more money in and our standards are rising. As we made clear in our White Paper "Raising the Standard", which we published a month ago, in the next Parliament we will continue that work.

Mr. Salmond: Did not the Education Minister effectively instigate the teachers' strike in Glasgow today through a financial settlement which aims a dagger at the heart of Scottish education? The Minister spent £250,000 on a study that basically told us that expenditure on secondary education in Scotland is higher because the provision is higher. Is it Tory policy to reduce provision in Scotland to the level that pertains south of the border? If so, the chances of the Education Minister getting his old job back in teaching after the election will be extremely limited.

Mr. Robertson: Every teacher marching in Glasgow will want to know what Glasgow city council has been doing with the additional £3.5 million, compared with last year, for education that it has received for next year. They will want to know why that city council is saying that it must cut front-line education services while it has managed to find money to send councillors to a symposium on cultural policies at St. Petersburg, an international rose trials exhibition at Rome, a meeting of the International Badminton Federation in Hong Kong; and to Rostov's city days event at Rostov-on-Don. That is what Glasgow teachers should be asking of Glasgow city council.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend share my astonishment that, given a substantial increase in real expenditure per pupil, nationalist councillors are saying that services in schools will have to be cut and certain subjects, such as music, will be charged for excessively—despite the fact that expenditure has increased?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. His local authority has received almost £2 million more than last year to spend on education next year. The Scottish National party-controlled council in the constituency of the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) will have £250,000 more to spend next year in comparison with last year. Teachers, parents and pupils should ask those councils what they are doing with that extra money.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: In the light of the comments that the Minister and his colleagues have made about narrowing the gap between expenditure per head in England and in Scotland, and given that the secondary school pupil-teacher ratio is 16 in England compared with

12 in Scotland, what would that ratio be if he and his colleagues were in power for a further five years? When can I tell my constituents that they will get a new academy at Garioch, Oldmeldrum—for which a site has been acquired, but for which capital consent is inadequate—given that the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), can get a school at Laurencekirk and the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) can get a new school at Banff? The current settlement is already inadequate, so how can it possibly be cut further?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman talks about teacher-pupil ratios, but he seems to forget that, during the lifetime of these four Conservative Governments, pupil-teacher ratios at primary and secondary schools have consistently fallen. I assure him that, during the lifetime of the next four Conservative Governments, they will continue to fall.

Public Expenditure (Glasgow)

14. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on public expenditure in Glasgow. [17326]

Mr. Kynoch: Public expenditure per head in Scotland is about 25 per cent. higher than in England, and Glasgow benefits significantly as a result.

Mr. Marshall: The Minister totally ignores the stark reality of the crisis facing the city of Glasgow. Will he be honest and tell us what he expects will be the cumulative effect of substantial cuts in the budgets of Scottish Homes in relation to Glasgow, of Glasgow city council, of the Glasgow development agency and of the Greater Glasgow health board? What effect will all those cuts have on the health and well-being of the citizens of Glasgow? What does he intend to do to help the city in his last few weeks as a Minister?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman should be addressing some of his comments to Glasgow city council. My hon. Friend the Housing Minister just mentioned some of the prioritisation that is going on in Glasgow at present. Incidentally, I should say, for the benefit of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), who said that Laurencekirk was not getting a school, that it successfully obtained it through the challenge fund today—a fact which I thought he might welcome.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) is being totally unrealistic about the situation in Glasgow, where Glasgow city council is seeking to create the impression that an increase in spending ability is a cut. The sooner those councillors—who appear to be the sort of people who are likely to put themselves forward as prospective candidates for a tax-raising parliament in Scotland if the Labour party were ever to come to power—get their priorities right and think of the people of Glasgow first, not themselves, the better for the people of Glasgow.

Hunterston Power Station

3.31 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton) (*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the incident at Hunterston power station.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): As the House will know, recently there was an incident at Hunterston B power station in Ayrshire.

I understand that Scottish Nuclear first identified contamination in Hunterston's carbon dioxide supply network on 20 February. The staff then investigated the problem and attributed it to a faulty non-return valve in the carbon dioxide supply. As a result of their investigations, it became apparent to Scottish Nuclear staff on 27 February that a possible route existed for contaminated carbon dioxide to move out of the site. That route involved transfer of carbon dioxide from the on-site tanks to road tankers delivering further supplies of the gas. Some similar transfer could occur from the road tankers to the main tank at the supply depot. That main tank also serves a number of food processing companies.

When Scottish Nuclear identified that possibility, it reported the problem to the transport company. It then calculated the maximum possible release of radiation and concluded that, although it was of no radiological significance, it should be reported to the regulatory bodies.

On 3 March, Scottish Nuclear informed the nuclear installations inspectorate and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, which in turn told the Scottish Office that day. I myself was told at about 6 pm that day.

I was, naturally, extremely concerned, and immediately took the advice of the chief medical officer for Scotland. He advised that the information and calculations provided on the incident indicated that the risk to public health—adults and children—was negligible.

Scottish Nuclear, under the supervision of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the nuclear installations inspectorate, has checked the carbon dioxide plant at Hunterston, the road tankers and the bulk storage depot. Those tests have revealed no radioactive contamination. Furthermore, and in order to provide final reassurance to the consumer, I have instructed that a number of products using carbon dioxide provided by the same company should be checked. Those checks are currently under way. I am delighted to be able to tell the House that the results of the first test, on products manufactured by Campsie Spring, show absolutely no evidence whatsoever of contamination. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the nuclear installations inspectorate have been checking the plant at Hunterston and various points in the supply chain. So far no radioactive contamination has been identified, and all the indications are that, if there has been any contamination, it has been very slight indeed.

I am—and, I am sure, the whole House will be—relieved that there appears to be no risk to public health as a result of this incident. There are, however, a number of aspects which give rise to concern—notably the delays that took place in drawing this problem to the attention of the authorities and the fact that it is possible for carbon dioxide tankers supplying the food industry also to make deliveries to a nuclear power station. I have asked the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and nuclear installations inspectorate for a full report on the incident, which I expect to receive within a week and which I will publish. In the light of this I will consider what further action should be taken.

Meanwhile I have asked Dr. Jeffrey, the chairman and chief executive of Scottish Nuclear, for an urgent meeting to explain his company's performance; and I have asked my officials to pursue with the nuclear operators in Scotland my view that no one should be using the same vehicles and equipment to make deliveries of carbon dioxide or indeed any other supplies to nuclear installations or to other locations where there may in consequence be a risk to human health. I understand that the nuclear installations inspectorate has already set in train its own review of arrangements for provision of carbon dioxide gas to all UK nuclear power stations.

As I have said, there are a number of points that I am following up, and I will keep hon. Members informed. I am extremely grateful to the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and to the leaders of the other Opposition parties for their constructive response to the briefing they were given. We are all concerned to put the information in the public domain without causing any panic. It is a tribute to the media, particularly north of the border, that they handled this information in a very responsible manner.

Mr. Robertson: I begin by thanking the Secretary of State for his statement and for courteously briefing the leaders of the other two parties and me last night. These are not party matters, and giving the Opposition parties advance information was both useful and constructive in this sensitive situation.

Although serious questions need to be answered about the incident, especially about the time it took for Scottish Nuclear to notify the outside world, and about the procedures for delivering carbon dioxide to a nuclear power station, I believe that the Secretary of State was absolutely right to publish a list of the companies that had been supplied with carbon dioxide and to institute immediate sample checks of their products. Ultra-caution must be the rule when it comes to the safety of food and drink—the public deserve nothing less.

No amount of technical assessment or expert guesswork will satisfy a public increasingly concerned about food safety scares. I hope that publication of the full test results will be done as a matter of urgency, to allay public concern and satisfy public curiosity. The companies involved are very large, with a host of consumers in Scotland and beyond. They employ many Scottish people in one of Scotland's biggest industries. We owe it to everyone in those industries to find out whether there is any danger in what happened at Hunterston.

There is a most persuasive argument to the effect that the risks involved are negligible, bordering on the non-existent, but for as long as there is any doubt at all, that doubt must be dispelled.

Although the Secretary of State may already have given an assurance on the matter, I urge on him the need for a full and open inquiry into what has happened and into its implications, to enable us better to comprehend how the situation came about and how it might be prevented from happening again.

To an outsider, it seems bizarre and incomprehensible that carbon dioxide for a nuclear power station can be delivered in the same road tankers as are used to supply food and fizzy drink manufacturers in the rest of Scotland. Will the Secretary of State seek, as he implied, to persuade those involved in the trade to examine the procedures urgently and thoroughly, and to change them at the earliest opportunity?

Will the Secretary of State also ensure that British Energy and Scottish Nuclear are told that it is unacceptable to delay informing the outside world and the public that such an incident has occurred? Although Hunterston nuclear power station and Scottish Nuclear have a first-class safety record, such delay in going public must never be allowed to happen again.

I conclude by commending the swift and open action that was taken by the chief medical officer for Scotland and the Scottish Office when the incident came to their notice. I hope that that will be the model for the future.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, especially for his support on the publication of the names of the companies. I know that that causes concern, and some of the companies were anxious that disclosure of the names might result in panic on the part of consumers. However, the responsible coverage of the matter and the consumers' right to that information vindicated the decision that was taken.

I am happy for the NII report to be published and I will arrange for it to be circulated to hon. Members. If any further follow-up action is required, I shall be happy to respond to representations from hon. Members.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman in respect of the procedures for the delivery of CO_2 and other products.

The matter of the delay will have to be examined by the NII. I should say by way of defence that Scottish Nuclear was of the view that there was no appreciable risk to health, even if there had been a transfer of radioactive material, but I rather share the hon. Gentleman's view that it is best to put such matters in the public domain so that the public can judge. One is more likely to get responsible coverage of the situation when those whose job it is to report these matters to the public feel that every piece of information has been disclosed by those who are in a position to do so.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the public will be reassured by his statement and by the steps that he proposes to take in the near future? I live near Chapelcross power station, which was commissioned 35 years ago by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. and which has the highest safety standards. I am sure that the reputation of that nuclear station and others in Scotland should reassure the public that an event such as that which occurred at Hunterston should not happen and is unlikely to happen again.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I agree with him about the high standards in the industry. The possibility of the transfer of the material was made known as a result of the monitoring that is carried out in the industry. I am sure that everyone appreciates the importance of maintaining the highest standards. The NII exists to ensure that those standards are maintained. Where an incident occurs, lessons will have to be learnt and will add to the security of an important industry and an important employer in Scotland.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): May I too thank the Secretary of State for his statement today and for the courtesy that he extended yesterday evening by informing me and the hon. Members for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond)?

Does the Secretary of State agree that the statement from the chief medical officer that the risk to health is negligible for adults and children, and the results of the first tests that the Secretary of State announced today, help to put the matter into proper perspective and show that the risk is minimal, if it exists at all? I am sure that the Secretary of State would agree that when nuclear incidents occur, there is natural public concern. I therefore endorse his decision on open disclosure as the best way to allay public concern. I too share the concern of the hon. Member for Hamilton with regard to the time taken to report it. It may appear to scientists that there is nothing to worry about it, but any delay adds to public concern.

Will the Secretary of State also ask the NII and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to investigate whether there have been any similar previous incidents involving a malfunctioning return valve at any United Kingdom nuclear installations, not only recently, from which lessons should have been learnt—quite apart, obviously, from ensuring that they are learnt in future?

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Of course that is one of the questions: could this have happened in the past? It is one of the aspects that I will certainly ensure is covered in the report by the NII. I agree with him about the timing. I should perhaps say, in case anyone is wondering what we were doing between 6 o'clock on Monday night and the issue of the statement last night, that our first priority was to establish who had obtained supplies of carbon dioxide. It took some time to do that. It was my view that it was best to disclose that at the same time as the announcement was made to prevent any panic in respect of other products that may not have been affected.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): As the Secretary of State is aware, I approached him last night on this matter, having become aware of it from my constituency, and I support the action that was subsequently taken. Does he agree that the overwhelmingly primary duty of the House today is to reassure the public that there is not a health risk in any of the products that potentially could have been affected? That is an important message. Having said that, the inquiries are axiomatic and essential; we must have inquiries.

The two areas on which the Secretary of State has focused are absolutely right: first, the use of a tanker that is not dedicated to the nuclear industry and, secondly, the whole question of timing. On that latter question, to be fair to the management at Hunterston and Scottish Nuclear, my understanding is that, as soon as they became aware, through logging the incident and consulting the nuclear installations inspectorate, that there was a reportable level of contamination, they reported it. The inquiry will doubtless examine that.

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

Before privatisation, Scottish Nuclear had established an excellent record for openness and for communicating with the public on all matters of potential concern. The crucial general principle that must be drawn out of this incident is that, in the private sector, that same tradition and practice of openness must be continued and there must at all points be a rigid, regulatory regime so that incidents, no matter how tiny and, as in this case, how unthreatening to public health, are investigated independently and promptly, with the maximum amount of information being made public as soon as possible.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and this may be the first and last recorded occasion on which I can congratulate him on using his considerable communication skills to put across an important message, as he did on BBC Radio Scotland this morning, when he emphasised the very minor nature of the incident. I agree with him about the timing. I do not want to prejudge the inquiry by the NII, but the papers that I have seen indicate that, when the incident was first discovered, it was logged, as it was required to be, as an event—an event being something of very little significance. It was only on Friday, I believe, after the Health and Safety Executive had been consulted, that it was raised to the status of an incident, which requires reporting to the regulatory authorities; the hon. Gentleman is right to mention that.

I do not wish to anticipate the NII report, but I have every confidence that the management of Scottish Nuclear acted in the best interests of safety, and at no time was there any suggestion that this incident involved any threat to public health. None the less, we are right to take it seriously, to follow it right through the supply chain and, as the hon. Gentleman has said, perhaps to alter practices in the light of this experience, which has certainly given us something of a fright.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): May I commend my right hon. Friend for the speed with which he has acted on this? It is breathtaking that, since last night, so much appears to have been done. Again, the emphasis on the fact that this incident does not threaten health is very important, but in any such incident there are lessons to be learnt. I wonder—being wise after the event, and thinking about the supply of CO_2 from central containers—whether not only the nuclear industry but other industries, such as the food industry, should consider separate tankers?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend has much more knowledge and experience of power stations than I have. [Hon. Members: "What?"] I meant power in the sense of generation of electricity. My hon. Friend has made an important point, and I will ensure that it is considered by the regulatory authorities.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What are the two most important questions that the Secretary of State and the Scottish Office will ask Dr. Jeffrey?

Mr. Forsyth: I am not sure whether they are in order of importance, but the order in which they come into my brain—having been challenged by the hon. Gentleman—is, first, to ask about the experience leading up to the possible leakage, and whether a leakage could have happened in the past. Secondly, I will want to pursue the point made by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) on timing and the importance of quick disclosure in matters of concern, and to ensure that those practices—which are required by regulations—are maintained.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): I add my congratulations to the Secretary of State on how the matter has been dealt with. The way in which it has been treated in the press justifies the speed with which it has been handled.

Hon. Members have already asked about delays in notification, and undoubtedly the Secretary of State will wish assiduously to pursue that matter himself. I am sure, however, that all hon. Members are concerned to know the precise timing of events, and why, at minimum, there appears to have been a four-day gap between ascertaining that there was a leak and passing on that information.

I should also express my amazement, and the amazement of the vast majority of people in Scotland, that the practice of using the same tanker to deliver CO_2 both to a nuclear reactor and to the domestic drinks industry appears to have been regarded as perfectly normal. Is the Secretary of State aware whether that is also the practice at Torness, which is a similar reactor? Even if there had been no incident, I suspect that the practice, if it had become well known, would have been regarded as unacceptable. We will be expecting an early assurance that the practice will cease.

Does the Secretary of State have—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must put her points much more briskly.

Ms Cunningham: Does the Secretary of State have a time scale in mind for the inquiries?

Mr. Forsyth: I know that people will want to have a speedy response and, as I said, I hope to have that response within a week. The hon. Lady has made some points which other hon. Members have touched on and with which I agree. I share her amazement that vehicles can be used for that purpose. All that I can say to the hon. Member for Hamilton is that—in the weeks that lie ahead, as we enter a general election campaign—he might like to reflect on the fact that one thing about being the Secretary of State for Scotland is that no day is the same, and every day brings its new challenges. I was told about the matter on the telephone on the way down from Inverness. It is quite extraordinary how many things can go wrong—things which people could not have anticipated. What is important is that those matters are dealt with. On the specific point on Torness, I will ensure that it is addressed in the report that the House will receive in due course.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I thank the Secretary of State for his swift action in testing products, and particularly for his reassurance on Campsie Spring water which, as he knows, is bottled in Lennoxtown in my constituency. I am sure that his reassurance will be a great relief to the company and to all those involved. Will he try to ensure that the

information that Campsie Spring water is safe is made readily available to as many outlets as possible and as soon as possible?

Mr. Forsyth: By announcing something in the House, one announces it to the world, but we shall certainly make sure that the information is circulated. I am extremely grateful to Campsie Spring and the other companies for the responsible way in which they have co-operated with Scottish Office officials in the public interest. The situation must have been terrifying for them, because their products were put in doubt.

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): Does the Secretary of State agree that the nuclear industry is an important part of the Scottish economy, with the highest safety standards? It is accepted that there may be a need to change operating procedures at nuclear stations. Will the Secretary of State continue to ensure that the incident is not used to undermine the future of the nuclear industry in Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth: I cannot control what people say and how they use issues to advance particular causes, however misguided. I agree that the nuclear industry is important in Scotland and that it has the highest standards. I also believe that, by the nature of the industry, it is not possible for us to be anything other than always on our guard for the possibilities of leakage or other incidents. The management of British Energy is committed to maintaining the highest standards. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern that some people, for their own interests, will no doubt wish to exploit such incidents. In this case, there is no cause for concern about public safety.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) implied that there might be something wrong at Torness. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to make it abundantly clear that there is no suggestion of anything wrong at Torness?

Mr. Forsyth: As far as I am aware, there is no cause for concern about Torness. I think that the hon. Lady said that we should check the procedures for the delivery of carbon dioxide and other materials at Torness, in line with other nuclear power stations. As I said earlier, that is being done.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): There have not been many statements or private notice questions on almost any subject in recent months. Does not the Secretary of State's presence at the Dispatch Box show that we are dealing with a serious matter? We should always remember that we are dealing with an industry that could be very unsafe. Will he also bear it in mind that his words today show clearly that, in the nuclear power industry, there is only a hair's breadth between getting away with it and having an incident of a major character?

Mr. Ingram: Like in the pits.

Mr. Skinner: It is not quite the same as the pits. My hon. Friend is not concerned about all those miners who were thrown out of work by the Government.

There is another point of view. All hon. Members seem to have accepted the Secretary of State's words as a reassurance. I had better tell him—somebody has to be clear about this—that so dangerous is the industry that I would not take his words at face value on this subject or any other. He would not recognise the truth if it was sprayed on his eyeballs.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is exactly the kind of individual whom the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) was concerned about. I am sorry that he has chosen to put forward that point of view. I am not asking him to accept assurances from me. I have told the House that the independent nuclear installations inspectorate will produce a report, which I shall circulate. If the hon. Gentleman still has concerns, I shall be happy to follow them up.

Points of Order

3.58 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I should like to correct an answer that I gave yesterday in response to a question from the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston).

Referring to Bristol councillors' allowances, I said:

"They are raising their own pay by up to 66 per cent."—[*Official Report*, 4 March 1997; Vol. 291, c. 702.]

I should have used the past tense.

According to a reply to a question to the chairman of Bristol city council's policy and finance committee, the increase in special responsibility allowances for 1995–96 was from £19,200 to £30,600. That is a 59.4 per cent. increase. A press report on that increase points out that annual allowances for the five chairmen increased from £1,200 to £2,000, which is a 66.67 per cent. increase.

I apologise, Madam Speaker. It was certainly not my intention to mislead the House.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware of the controversy surrounding the remarks of the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), which maligned women in general but were particularly insulting to female Members of Parliament. Many hon. Members believe that his behaviour has brought the House into disrepute. Is there a relevant or appropriate Committee to which the matter may be referred in order to resolve it?

Madam Speaker: No. As I am sure the hon. Lady is aware, there is no appropriate Committee of the House to which the matter could be referred. As Speaker, I have no responsibility or authority regarding speeches or comments made outside the House. My task is to keep my ears open for comments made in the House—and I think that I have enough to do in that regard without concerning myself with remarks made outside it.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My point of order concerns the rights of constituents to approach Members of Parliament. Some constituents who are concerned about the closure of the Rotherham benefits agency came to my surgery on Saturday, and I shall take up their case with the relevant Minister. However, I was astonished when they gave me a top-level circular that was issued to all Benefits Agency staff threatening them with disciplinary action or dismissal if they contacted Members of Parliament about the matter. I believe that the Benefits Agency director, Peter Mathison, should be made to come to the Bar of the House on his knees to apologise for that threat to the right of British citizens to contact their Members of Parliament. I seek your ruling, Madam Speaker, so that no constituent of mine or of any other hon. Member need fear contacting their Members of Parliament about any issue.

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me a little notice of the matter. Without necessarily commenting on a particular case, I confirm that I am strongly of the view that constituents should not be prevented by their employer or anyone else in a similar position from taking matters of public or personal concern to their Member of Parliament. The House and all its Members are here to represent the people, and we cannot do that properly if people's grievances and complaints are stifled.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), Madam Speaker, will time be made available for the Prime Minister to make a statement to the House about the disreputable remarks of the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans)?

Madam Speaker: If a Minister wishes to make a statement, I have no alternative but to hear it.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My point of order is not about the racist and sexist clown whose utterances have disgraced this House. Madam Speaker, like your predecessors, you have said on many occasions that statements about policy should be made first in the House. I draw your attention to the fact that today both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Social Security made very important statements about the future of the state earnings-related pension scheme that will affect millions of people in this country. Clearly no statement will be made about the matter in the House today, although the announcement was made publicly and has been reported on radio and television. Does that not demonstrate a contempt for the House of Commons? Madam Speaker, although you are not responsible for whether statements are made, I ask you to let it be known not only to Government Members but to the whole House that statements on important matters of policy such as this—although the measure will not be implemented because the Government will not be re-elected—should be made to the House of Commons first rather than to the media or the general public.

Madam Speaker: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I repeat that, when there is to be major change of policy, a statement should be made first to the House. I noted the comments that were made this morning, and I made it my business to find out when questions could be asked about the matter. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that he will be able to put down such questions to Social Security Ministers on 11 March.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I think that many hon. Members—particularly those on Opposition Benches —feel particularly outraged that today's briefing came from Tory central office and that the announcement was made from Downing street. The Government are proposing an epoch-making change in pensions policy that will affect millions of people. It is an abuse of Parliament if we cannot have a statement in the House about such an important matter, particularly during an election period. If there is to be a string of such announcements in the run-up to the election, I suggest that the Prime Minister cannot have it both ways. If he wants to announce Tory party policies, let him do so from

central office. He should not be allowed to abuse the dignity of his office by refusing to come to the House to answer questions.

Madam Speaker: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members could take the opportunity at business questions tomorrow to press for a statement or a debate next week on those matters.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I ask for your guidance on whether it is normal practice, in the weeks before a general election, for parties to give their thoughts and ideas on what they may do after the election? That becomes policy only after the election.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has made some wise comments.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. You suggested that questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security could be tabled for 11 March. However, that gives only five sitting days, and 10 sitting days are required to enable the Secretary of State to answer oral questions in the House on that matter.

Madam Speaker: Questions should be tabled on 11 March for answer on 25 March.

Civil Actions (Limit on Proceedings)

4.5 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to contain civil actions for compensation.

It used to be said that Englishmen, and indeed women, had stiff upper lips and a calm approach to life's vicissitudes. Misfortune was met with a stoic resolve, and with comments such as "chin up". That has changed, perhaps for the better in some ways. Sadly, British society has become a great deal more litigious in respect of any misfortune, and we seem, in the words of the Lord Chancellor, to be living with a "compensation culture". No longer does the concept of an act of God, an accident or bad luck feature in most people's calculations. Someone else must be to blame for misfortune, and that someone should pay compensation. We seem to be following the United States of America. I think that the House will agree that that is not a healthy development in our society.

I recall the case of a man who slipped on the cobb in Lyme Regis in 1988. One would suppose that anyone walking beside the sea would have a duty of care, and would realise that sea water makes the stones slippery. Nevertheless, the incident was thought worthy of a court case, and he was initially awarded £95,000 compensation, because the council had not put up a sign saying that wet stones are slippery.

Similar cases are becoming depressingly common. Each day's newspapers show someone at an industrial tribunal or in court demanding compensation. A female teacher at a Roman Catholic school, which tries to uphold the tenets of that faith, claimed that she had been constructively dismissed. Her only fault was to have had three children by different fathers, one of whom was a former pupil half her age. Some may say that that does not set a good example to other children, but she definitely wants compensation.

One would hope that most educated people know that west Africa used to be called the white man's grave, because of the disease and fever prevalent there. The trainee solicitor who went to Ghana and contracted dysentery did not, and she of course wants compensation. She wants two thirds of a million pounds, because her company must have been at fault as it did not warn her that she should be careful about what she ate.

Schoolchildren intend to sue their schools because they did not get good enough grades at examinations. Three former students are suing their university because they did not get good enough degrees. There is the extraordinary case of a prisoner who was awarded £100 because he thought that the haircut he was given in prison was too short. What complete nonsense. Some inmates in Strangeways were each given a settlement of £5,000 because they were present during a riot. The convicted killer, Christopher Clunis, was awarded legal aid—taxpayers' money—and will spend at least £100,000 of it suing Camden and Islington health authority. He and his lawyers will benefit, but no one else will, and justice certainly will not.

Women joined the armed forces on the understanding that they would have to leave if they became pregnant. After they had left, they quickly discovered that that could

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

be a nice little earner, and as a result taxpayers paid out £57 million. Similarly, members of the emergency services such as the police and the fire service must expect to see ghastly sights—I certainly did when I was a soldier. If those sights affect them, of course they should be given medical help, but I do not believe that they should be given public money as compensation for going about their duty.

Finally, some Leicester City fans near my constituency are suing the Football Association for distress over the disputed penalty against Chelsea. I assume that that is a joke, but they have served a writ.

I do not suggest that those who suffer real injury or financial loss should not be compensated if somebody has been negligent. However, I believe that we are going down the road of America, where it is said that doctors will not stop to attend injured people in the street for fear that they may be sued if they make a mistake and that their insurance may not cover them. That cannot be good for society.

The generations of my parents and grandparents suffered huge deprivation and the great traumatic stress of two world wars. They did not spend their time whingeing, but got on with their lives and were determined to improve the world. One might contrast that with a soldier who took part in the campaign in the Falklands for about a month. Eight years later, after a heavy drinking session he took out a pistol in his accommodation, fired it at a television set and threatened his comrades. That soldier received £100,000 because, of course, he had post-traumatic stress disorder. That certainly should have been spotted before he was promoted twice in the preceding eight years. Apparently, we are now told by the European Court of Human Rights that he should have been sent to bed and never prosecuted by a court martial. Not many soldiers would agree.

The money does not grow on trees and, in many cases, it does not even come from the private sector. It comes from the public purse—the pockets of taxpayers. Every hon. Member can think of better things on which it should be spent. If it comes from private sources, it will probably come from insurance companies and, therefore, is reflected in the higher premiums paid by all, including those least able to pay, such as many pensioners.

My Bill proposes that we should turn the tide of this ludicrous litigation. I propose that there should be a test of common sense and that an arbitrator or ombudsman should be appointed to deal with personal injuries and personal litigation of this kind. That arbitrator would give an opinion based on sensible and pragmatic guidelines. It would then be up to any plaintiff to refuse to accept that opinion, but if a plaintiff did go to court, there would be no legal aid and there would be a presumption that should the plaintiff lose, he or she would be liable for all costs.

The Bill would lay down pragmatic guidelines for the judiciary based on common sense, and on proven injury or financial loss to the plaintiff. There would not be binding regulations, but guidelines which might change the culture of litigation.

Unlike many hon. Members I am not a lawyer, but I can see that personal litigation has become a lawyer's bonanza. I am distressed that the Law Society sees fit to set up an accident line to encourage those who may have cut a finger to call to see if there is anything in it for them. There is obviously something in it for the lawyers. There is an association of personal injury lawyers which wrote to me recently—and, I suspect, to all other Members of Parliament—which seems to exist to encourage people to complain for whatever reason in the hope of getting compensation.

The no win, no fee system is particularly dangerous since the pursuit of real justice must be a long way down the list of priorities of any lawyer involved. I would rather see taxpayers' money go to those who deserve compensation for some real injury, not to lawyers touting for business.

Two years ago this month I introduced another ten-minute Bill, the Eradication of Mink Bill. I said then that it could be called a Bill for the conservation of water voles. I was gratified on Monday and yesterday to see the coverage given to David Bellamy and others who are publicising the plight of the water vole. I am delighted at the high profile that their campaign is now receiving.

This Bill may not become law in this Parliament. Nevertheless, in another two years, or at some time in the next Parliament, I hope that measures will be enacted so that only genuine personal injury or financial loss will lead to the pursuit of compensation and that our litigious compensation culture may thereby be limited.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Andrew Robathan.

CIVIL ACTIONS (LIMIT ON PROCEEDINGS)

Mr. Andrew Robathan accordingly presented a Bill to contain civil actions for compensation: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Thursday 1 May, and to be printed [Bill 129].

Prevention of Terrorism

4.14 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move,

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 18th February, be approved.

I wish to begin by thanking Mr. John Rowe QC for carrying out the annual review of the legislation. His report informs our debate today. His clear conclusion, following wide consultation, and an entirely independent scrutiny of the operation of the Act in 1996, is that the Act remains necessary, and that it should be renewed, in its entirety, for a further 12 months. The Government share his view, and accept his recommendation.

It is now 23 years since the prevention of terrorism legislation was first enacted. The present Act was passed in 1989, and, like its predecessors, it was intended to be a temporary measure made in response to an exceptional threat. Very regrettably, the threat we face from terrorism remains as great today. Within our midst, a callous, murderous minority remains determined to use violence to achieve its ends.

Last year, the House renewed the Act under the dark shadow of the bombing of South Quay, the deaths of two people caught in the blast, and the formal ending of the IRA's ceasefire. This year, we must consider the need for its provisions against the background of a continuing campaign by the Provisional IRA in Great Britain, and a return to violence in Northern Ireland. The past 12 months reveal an all too familiar legacy of the destruction of lives, families, homes, livelihoods and communities.

Following the South Quay bomb, there were further attacks on the mainland, and another death. Those culminated in the bombing of Manchester city centre on Saturday 15 June. More than 200 people were injured in that outrage. I saw the destruction for myself a few days later. It was a miracle that no one was killed, and a testament to the skills of all those who worked so quickly to move more than 80,000 people to safety.

In Northern Ireland, the IRA stepped up its targeting, and readied its resources for a full return to violence in the Province. That came, with tragic consequences, on 7 October 1996. Two car bombs were detonated, one shortly after the other, and without warning, inside Thiepval barracks in Lisburn. Thirty-eight people were injured and, as the House knows, Warrant Officer James Bradwell later died of his injuries. Hon. Members will remember that the second bomb had been placed outside the medical centre. It was deliberately timed to catch those trying to help those wounded in the first explosion. Such acts speak volumes about the kind of people with whom we have to contend.

That attack has been followed by numerous others, many of which have been either abandoned or successfully disrupted by the security forces. However, only last month, on 12 February, Lance Bombardier Stephen Restorick was murdered by the IRA while checking a car at a vehicle checkpoint in Bessbrook. Stephen's parents hope that their son's tragic death will inspire renewed efforts on all sides to find a peaceful solution. I urge the IRA to listen to them, and to abandon violence for good. I urge the loyalists to listen to them, lest they fall into the trap of retaliation set for them by the IRA.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Leaving aside any controversy about the effectiveness of the legislation, is the Home Secretary aware that, on Monday in Dublin, the Taoiseach went out of his way to condemn the foul and brutal murder of the soldier whom the right hon. and learned Gentleman has just mentioned—a view entirely endorsed by all the Irish Deputies, as well as by all hon. Members of this House who were present? In reply to questions, the Taoiseach went on to say that the Irish authorities will continue to co-operate as closely as possible with the British in every way in dealing with terrorism.

Mr. Howard: Yes, of course I welcome those words by the Taoiseach, and the co-operation that we receive from the security authorities in the Republic.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, in the same speech, the Taoiseach said that he equated what happened at Drumcree with such an atrocity? He said that he felt that Drumcree was as bad as the Canary Wharf bomb. Although my right hon. and learned Friend may find what the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said helpful, does he not agree that the sort of comment that I have described is outrageous?

Mr. Howard: I have not seen that part of the speech, and I prefer not to comment without having read it for myself. I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh) *rose—*

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I hope that we are not about to turn the debate into a textual analysis of a speech made in another Parliament by the Head of another Government. We are here to renew the provisions of the prevention of terrorism Act.

Mr. McNamara: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Howard: No, I shall not give way on that point. I intend to proceed with the matter before the House.

I can assure the House that the IRA's atrocities have not held up, and will not hold up, the search for a political settlement in Northern Ireland. The talks process remains the only democratic alternative to the futility of further violence.

The IRA and its supporters think that terrorism will achieve results that cannot be secured through negotiation and the ballot box. They could not be more wrong. The multi-party talks process began on 10 June—without Sinn Fein—and continues today. It will continue in the next Parliament. Delegates representing the opinions of the vast majority in Northern Ireland are engaged in a real effort to achieve an acceptable political settlement and a lasting peace. For that reason, we still wish to see Sinn Fein join the talks, but that is entirely in its hands.

[Mr. Howard]

The IRA knows what it must do: it must deliver an unequivocal ceasefire, and it must stop its paramilitary activities. It must abandon violence for good.

The fact that there have been no terrorist attacks on the mainland since the appalling attack—

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Does the Home Secretary see the irony in what he has just said? Originally it was the demand for decommissioning that stopped the progress on peace that we wanted, whereas now the Government appear to have abandoned that. Do they not realise the error of their ways in terms of what they previously demanded?

Mr. Howard: There has been no change whatever in the Government's position. I have just said that, if Sinn Fein is to enter the talks, the IRA must abandon violence for good. In the face of that statement, the hon. Gentleman called upon the Government to see the error of their ways. Was he suggesting that to demand of the IRA that it abandon violence for good is an error? If not, let him stand up again and explain himself.

Mr. Connarty: That is an appalling misinterpretation. The error of the Government's ways that I was pointing out was the fact that it was the demand for decommissioning that stopped the progress. I hope that the Home Secretary accepts that. The Government have now moved their position, and I welcome that, but does the Home Secretary not accept that it was such errors in the past that led us to where we are now?

Mr. Howard: No, I do not accept that for one moment. If any body is to abandon violence for good, it can have no objection to decommissioning—a fairly obvious point, which seems to have entirely escaped the hon. Gentleman, and, I fear, many of his hon. Friends.

The fact that there have been no terrorist attacks on the mainland since the appalling attack on Manchester is no thanks to the IRA. Credit must in large part go to the vigilance of the police and the Security Service. They have had several significant successes in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland over the past year.

For example, the police and security services believe that, in July last year, with the discovery and seizure of a large number of devices in London, they foiled a serious and imminent terrorist attack on the mainland. Another joint operation led to the seizure in September of a substantial amount of explosives, weapons and other terrorist equipment in London. The haul included more than 6 tonnes of home-made explosive—enough for several bombs the size of the one that exploded in Manchester.

Those achievements, and many others in Northern Ireland, did not come easily. They were hard won by the determination, skill and vigilance of police officers and of the Security Service. We owe them a deep debt of gratitude.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my right hon. and learned Friend pass on the congratulations of all hon. Members to the members of the Security Service, who never get any real thanks for the clandestine work that they undertake?

Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree, however, that all law enforcement agencies are united on the need to allow telephone intercept transcript evidence in criminal trials in the United Kingdom? Is it not a curiosity, indeed an anachronism, that telephone intercept evidence recorded in the United States can be used in criminal trials here, but conversations recorded under his warrant in the United Kingdom cannot? Has he had any representations on the topic from the National Criminal Intelligence Service, Customs and Excise, the Security Service or the police?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the first part of his intervention; the second part raises difficult questions that were also considered by Lord Lloyd in his report on what we might need by way of anti-terrorist provisions in the event of a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. That is still under consideration. If I may say so, the matter is not quite as simple and straightforward as my hon. Friend's intervention might lead one to suppose.

We must not forget another key factor in the successes of the police and the Security Service: the powers contained in the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. The Act gives the police the powers they need to prevent whenever possible, and otherwise to investigate, terrorist attacks, and to bring the perpetrators to justice. I am convinced that those powers are still necessary; that is why I ask the House to renew them.

As Mr. Rowe's report makes clear, the powers to arrest and to extend detention under the Act are vital weapons in the fight against terrorism. In Great Britain in 1996, there were 84 detentions under the Act; of the 23 suspects who were held for more than the initial 48-hour period, 13 were subsequently charged with serious terrorist-related offences.

In Northern Ireland, 569 people were detained under the Act, 48 of whom were held for more than the initial 48-hour period; of those, 20 were subsequently charged with serious terrorist-related offences; and 135 other detainees were charged with other offences.

In 1996, the powers of detention under the Act were used on two occasions in respect of suspected international terrorist activity, although neither detainee was subsequently charged. I remain convinced that the powers are needed in relation both to international terrorism and to terrorism in connection with the affairs of Northern Ireland.

The House will recall that two people, both of whom were originally arrested under the Act in 1995, were convicted last December of the car bombing in London of the Israeli Embassy and of a Jewish charity in 1994; each is now serving a 20-year sentence. An Algerian national, who was also originally arrested under the Act in 1995, remains in custody here, subject to an application by the French authorities to extradite him in connection with the bombing campaign in France in 1995.

Many Opposition Members believe that extensions of detention should be granted by judges rather than by a Secretary of State. Mr. Rowe re-examined the issue in his report. Drawing on his experience of the way in which the English and Welsh courts deal with public interest immunity hearings, he concludes that judicial involvement might be possible in principle in England and Wales, but not in the current circumstances in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Rowe thinks that it would be inappropriate for there to be different systems for granting extensions of detention in different parts of the United Kingdom, and concludes that judicial involvement in the process should not be introduced anywhere in the United Kingdom at the present time.

The Government do not believe that it would be right to involve the judiciary in the extension of the detention process. That is because decisions to authorise the detention of terrorist suspects for periods beyond 48 hours are often made on the basis of sensitive information that cannot be revealed to a suspect or his legal adviser without compromising the source of the intelligence. If such information were revealed, it might well give rise to a serious risk to persons assisting the police, or lead to the loss of valuable intelligence.

Any new procedure that allowed a court to make what amounts to an executive decision on information not presented to the detainee or his legal adviser, and without the giving of reasons or the possibility of an appeal, would represent a radical departure from the principles that govern judicial proceedings in an adversarial system. It would create a real risk of undermining judicial independence, as the judiciary would be perceived as part of the investigation and prosecution process.

Mr. McNamara: The Home Secretary seems to be rejecting one of Lord Lloyd's recommendations. Will he tell us what other recommendations he is rejecting?

Mr. Howard: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman's intervention. He follows these matters closely, and we have put it on record that, as Lord Lloyd was invited to review the position on the assumption that there was a lasting peace in Northern Ireland and as—most regrettably—that has not yet come to pass, we have not formed a view on Lord Lloyd's recommendations. We said as much in answer to a parliamentary question. It is not a question of our having rejected Lord Lloyd's recommendations; we have not reached a view on them.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Home Secretary not think that his defence of the PTA system, under which he as Home Secretary can grant an extension of a detention order, is very perverse? He seems to be defending a judicial procedure that can keep people in custody for up to seven days without access to the courts. Does he not think that he should take account of the international condemnation of that system? After all, it is a denial of the liberty of the individuals involved.

Mr. Howard: I entirely reject every word of that intervention. Far from there being international condemnation, as the hon. Gentleman will no doubt be aware, the question of derogation from the European convention of human rights on that specific issue has been tested before the court, and the court did not uphold the challenge that was made in the Brannigan case.

Mr. McNamara: I am sorry to delay the Home Secretary's speech, but may I pursue the point? I accept what he said about the premise on which Lord Lloyd made his recommendations, but Lord Lloyd also made specific recommendations for a raft of what he would regard as emergency powers after we have attained a particular status. That is what we were talking about.

Are the Government saying that, because the premise has not been accepted, they do not accept any of Lord Lloyd's recommendations; or is the Home Secretary merely saying that at present they are not accepting that particular recommendation because they have not reached a view on Lord Lloyd's recommendations, which were made on a premise that the Home Secretary does not accept in any event?

Mr. Howard: We have made our position very clear. I shall say something about it in a moment. We accept some of Lord Lloyd's recommendations relating to extra-territorial jurisdiction; as for the generality of his recommendations, which were made on the assumption that there was a lasting peace in Northern Ireland and which indicate the legislative framework that he thinks would be appropriate in those circumstances, we have said that, as that assumption has not yet been fulfilled, we see no need to state our attitude to those recommendations at this stage. We shall continue to keep them under review. If and when—I hope that it will happen very soon—the assumption that Lord Lloyd was asked to make comes about, we will consider what decisions to make in the light of the circumstances at the time. We have made that clear.

The Act contains other provisions that play a vital part in disrupting and combating terrorism. Again, as Mr. Rowe's report makes clear, the powers to stop, examine, and search those coming into, or leaving, Great Britain or Northern Ireland form a vital part of our defences. Of great importance, too, are the powers of the police to investigate terrorist finances and to obtain production and explanation orders in relation to funds and other material found.

As the House knows, we added to the powers available to the police under the PTA last April. We gave the police additional powers to stop and search individuals for articles of use in carrying out terrorist acts; to seal off the streets to prevent or investigate a terrorist attack; and to search non-residential property and unaccompanied freight at ports. Those additional powers are already proving their worth, as Mr. Rowe's report makes clear.

The police have told me of the use they have made in recent investigations of the power to search, under warrant, non-residential premises without having to specify the one in which they believe the terrorist material for which they are looking may be found. The additional powers to stop and search have also had an impact: the police believe that they have had a significant deterrent effect, and have disrupted the ability of terrorists to move themselves and their equipment around at will. In those circumstances, it is quite extraordinary that 21 Labour Members saw fit to vote against the Prevention of Terrorism (Additional Powers) Act 1996 on Second Reading.

Perhaps the most sensitive power in the Act, and one which the Opposition have long opposed, is that of exclusion. I know that some hon. Members, while wholly supportive of other parts of the legislation, are concerned about denying British citizens access to part of their country. As one who remains proud to call himself a Unionist, I understand and sympathise with their concerns. However, when faced with people who will stop at nothing to achieve their ends, we have to accept exceptional measures—measures that in normal circumstances we would not be prepared even to contemplate.

[Mr. Howard]

I have no doubt of the value of these powers. Exclusion orders disrupt and deter those bent on carrying out terrorist attacks, and deprive the terrorist organisations to which they belong of some of their most experienced operators. That is also Mr. Rowe's clear conclusion. If the power can help us to combat the terrorist menace, we must keep it. It would be wholly irresponsible to discard it simply because it results in the restriction of the movements of certain individuals.

Some suggest that the process for making exclusion orders is arbitrary and unfair. Mr. Rowe's report makes it clear that it is not. He has looked at all files relating to the cases that were dealt with in 1996, and I am pleased to note that he found that all those involved in making the orders carried out their task carefully and fairly. The powers are used sparingly, not least in recognition of their exceptional nature. There are currently 23 exclusion orders in force. That is the lowest total ever. However, I do not rule out the possibility that further orders will be made. Each case will, as now, be considered very carefully on its merits.

There are those who argue that, as the number excluded is now relatively small, it would make little difference if all the orders were revoked. I do not accept that. We believe that they are needed, and that they are effective. The alternative—mounting surveillance operations on all those currently excluded—would have substantial resource implications. It is simply not realistic, particularly when the police and the Security Service are fully engaged in preventing further attacks and investigating those that have already taken place.

I have explained why we need to renew the prevention of terrorism Act for a further 12 months, but I should like to turn briefly to the future. In December 1995, the Government asked Lord Lloyd of Berwick to consider the future need for specific counter-terrorism legislation in the United Kingdom in the event of a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. His report was published in October 1996. Very regrettably, the conditions that he was asked to anticipate do not exist at present. That is why the Government believe, as I announced on 20 February, that it is too early to reach any firm conclusions on the more fundamental legislative changes that Lord Lloyd proposed. Our hope is that there will soon be an end to the violence, and that we shall then be able to look again at the possibility of providing a new legislative framework for combating terrorism.

However, I am determined that the police should have all the powers they need to combat effectively the current threat from terrorism. That is why I intend to introduce proposals in due course to strengthen the existing controls on terrorist finances. Those proposals will build on Lord Lloyd's very helpful ideas.

One area that Lord Lloyd looked at particularly closely was legislation to deal with the activities of United Kingdom supporters of foreign terrorism. He concluded:

"The most significant additional measure which the Government can take is to amend the law of conspiracy so as to facilitate the prosecution of those who conspire here to commit terrorist acts abroad. It may take a prosecution or two before the measure takes full effect but it should then serve as a demonstration, both to those involved and to the international community, of the Government's determination to make the UK as difficult and uncomfortable a place as possible for supporters of terrorism overseas".

That is why I attach great importance to the private Member's Bill on conspiracy and incitement introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson).

I have to say that the behaviour of the Labour party towards the Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill has been disgraceful. The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) previously promised the Opposition's support for the Bill. On 11 February, he said:

"I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on the fact that his Bill has gained the support of the Government and the Opposition."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 11 February 1997; c. 16.]

Yet Labour Members blocked its Report proceedings on two separate occasions. Last Friday was the last chance for it to become law this Session. When it came to the crunch, Labour Front Benchers who were present last Friday, including the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), sat on their hands, knowing that their hon. Friends' actions would torpedo the Bill. They preferred playing party games to supporting effective action against the threat from international terrorism.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Will the Home Secretary also tell the House that, despite his statement that the Bill is a matter of importance, the Conservative party could not muster 40 people so that the Bill could proceed?

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman had wanted that Bill to proceed to the statute book in accordance with what was said by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth, he could have gone into the Division Lobby last Friday and helped to get the numbers up to the 40 that was required. The hon. Gentleman sat on his hands, in full knowledge of the consequences of his action.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a member of the Government to incite Front Benchers—his own and others—to interfere in private Members' legislation? Some of us think that the Labour Front-Bench team behaved properly by being neutral on the matter.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): The hon. Lady's point is a matter of debate, not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Howard: I am glad to see the hon. Member for Garscadden arrive in the Chamber at this point. The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) may wish that her party was neutral. That is fine, but the Labour party Front-Bench spokesman said that the Bill had the support of that party. If it did, the least that could have happened last Friday was that the right hon. Member for Garscadden and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North could have gone into the Division Lobby to help bring the numbers up to the quota that was required to make progress on the Bill.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Why is it that the party which claims to be the Government of Britain

cannot get 20 of its own Members of Parliament out of bed in time to come to the House to help carry legislation that the Government want?

Mr. Howard: If we are assured that a private Member's Bill has the support of the Opposition, we are entitled to expect that they will support it. I suppose that the hon. Gentleman would say that we ought to know better by now than to rely on assurances from the Labour Front-Bench spokesman that the party supports a Bill. In fact, the Bill was torpedoed by hon. Members sitting on the Labour Benches.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has given that issue a fair run. We must return to what is immediately before us.

Mr. Howard: I am happy to do that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As for the attitude of the Opposition to the prevention of terrorism Act—

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. Such a measure should not be left to a private Member's Bill. May I ask him a question concerning the role of the Secretary of State for Scotland in the scheme of things? On Scottish police operations, will he confirm that such matters rest with the Secretary of State for Scotland and not with himself?

Mr. Howard: I am not entirely clear to what matters the hon. Gentleman is referring. He referred to "such matters", but I am not entirely clear what he means. The responsibilities of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland are well known.

Mr. Allason: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the legislation we are discussing will not cover Algerian or Sikh separatists who are plotting terrorist activities in their own countries from this country? Will he confirm that, on the basis of what happened on Friday, they will have a free run for another year?

Mr. Howard: Broadly speaking, my hon. Friend is correct. If the activities of those to whom my hon. Friend referred specifically relate to plotting to carry out murder, and if that can be established, they are covered by the law. If they are plotting to commit acts of terrorism generally, my hon. Friend's analysis is entirely correct.

Every year from 1983 to 1995 the Labour party opposed the renewal of the prevention of terrorism Act. The right hon Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), now the leader of the Labour party, continued that stance when he became Opposition spokesman on home affairs. Then, last year, there was an abrupt change. While mortars were raining down on Heathrow in 1994, the Labour party voted against the Act; last year, in the aftermath of South Quay, the Opposition abstained.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) gave a curious reason for the change of policy. He said:

"we do not want any message going out to them"—

the IRA—

"that they could glean any idea from our position that there could be any kind of excuse for the renewal of bombing by them".

The logic of the hon Gentleman's argument is that, for the previous 15 years, Labour had indeed been giving the bombers an excuse. The logic of his argument is that that is exactly what the Labour party was doing when his leader had responsibility for shadowing home affairs. But last year the Opposition abstained. On that most fundamental measure for the protection of the people of this country, they had no view. Could anything more clearly demonstrate the fact that they are wholly unfit to govern?

Mr. Mallon: The implication of the Secretary of State's remarks is that anyone who votes against the legislation is somehow providing succour, help or assistance to the IRA. As someone who lives in south Armagh; who has fought against violence from the Provisional IRA for the past 27 years—not from the comfort of a debating chamber but out on the roads and streets of south Armagh—and will continue to do so; and who will vote against this legislation, may I ask: is the right hon. and learned Gentleman suggesting that I am giving any help, succour or assistance to the Provisional IRA?

Mr. Howard: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's record. The implication which I drew did not flow from my words, but flowed directly from the words of the hon. Member for Blackburn which I quoted. However, I will go further and say the following to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), while acknowledging his record. It is not good enough for him or for the Labour party to claim allegiance to the objective of defeating the IRA—to the end of defeating the IRA—if they are not prepared to support in the Division Lobbies of the House the means by which that objective can be attained. The two cannot be separated and divorced in the way I believe that the hon. Gentleman would seek to do; they go together.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the Secretary of State for giving way again, because he has put his finger on the point that I hope to make, and which I have been making for the past 11 years in our annual debates. The ways and the means of doing it need not necessarily be those represented by the legislation that we are discussing. The empirical evidence is that the approach is not the right one, because for 27 years it has failed. Even at this late stage, I ask the Secretary of State, is it not time for the present Government to consider different ways and means? As I say to the IRA, one cannot separate the means from the objectives. If the methods are wrong, they hinder progress towards the objective.

Mr. Howard: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but, in discharging the responsibilities I have for the protection of the people of this country, I am more inclined to take advice on the necessity for these powers from the police, the Security Service and the independent reviewer who has been appointed to inquire into these matters than I am from the hon. Gentleman.

[Mr. Howard]

I have explained why the Government believe that it is essential that the prevention of terrorism Act should be renewed, in its entirety, for a further 12 months. We still face an exceptional threat from terrorism. The spate of recent attacks in Northern Ireland speaks for itself. No one in the House today should be under any illusion that the absence of an attack on the mainland since the Manchester bombing means that the threat here has disappeared. There is no complacency in the Government or in the security forces. There should certainly be no complacency among hon. Members.

The Act gives the police the powers they need to fight terrorism. It is our duty to ensure that those powers remain available to them—and for as long as they are needed. The Government are committed to keeping them. I urge Opposition Members to vote with us to renew the Act. A united House tonight will send the clearest possible message to the terrorists that their actions cannot, and will not, be tolerated; that they cannot win; that the bomb and the bullet will never triumph over the wishes of the vast majority who want peace and democracy.

I commend the order to the House.

4.52 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): In his report on legislation against terrorism, Lord Lloyd of Berwick devotes an important part of his introduction to a discussion about the nature of terrorism—what makes it different from, and so much worse than even other serious crimes. He suggests several possible reasons. The first, he suggests, is that a single incident of terrorism may cause many deaths, but, as he says, there is nothing special about terrorism in that respect—the same applies to any multiple killing.

The second possible reason that Lord Lloyd discusses is the "indiscriminate nature" of terrorist offences, but he then says that that, too, does not distinguish terrorist offences from other serious crimes as, on one hand, the victims of many crimes are unknown to the perpetrator, and on the other, many terrorist acts are directed at specific known individuals.

Lord Lloyd suggests, therefore, that

"neither of these reasons . . . serve sufficiently to explain the singular sense of horror and revulsion created by terrorist crime".

He concludes that the reason why terrorism produces that singular horror and revulsion is that

"terrorist crime is seen as an attack on society as a whole, and our democratic institutions. It is akin to an act of war."

Those are powerful words, but they accurately define the nature of terrorism and the threat that it poses to our society.

Those scores of thousands who went into the city of Manchester on the beautiful Saturday morning of 15 June 1996, expected to be going about their business, shopping, serving in the shops or simply enjoying the sunshine in one of the most vibrant city centres in the United Kingdom. That expectation was suddenly shattered by the huge bomb placed there by the Provisional IRA, with no concern for the safety of the public or for the future of that city. It was thanks only to the professionalism and courage of the police, the other emergency services and the public that—astonishingly—no one was killed. Hundreds of people could have been murdered in that blast, and 200 were indeed injured.

For those caught up in the blast, and for the whole country, the planting of that bomb, like every other outrage perpetrated by the IRA, amounted to an act of war, not just against a democratically elected Government but against the whole of our society.

As I saw when I visited the area later, the scale of the destruction could not properly be conveyed by television or photographs: it had to be seen to be believed. The great city centre of Manchester looked like Beirut at the height of its civil war. Colleagues who represent the city may wish to say more about the impact of the bomb and its aftermath. I simply want to pay tribute to all who were there that day and to the extraordinary efforts made since by the city council, the chamber of commerce, businesses and community groups, and by the Deputy Prime Minister, who I know has been most helpful to the city.

As we have heard from the Secretary of State, terrorist acts have continued in Northern Ireland, and major devastation on the mainland has been averted only by the skill of the security forces and the police. I pay tribute to all of them.

I also endorse the Home Secretary's appeal to the IRA to end its violence, and his appeal to those on the Unionist side not to be provoked into violent retaliation.

Because of the particular and terrifying nature of terrorism, there must be, so long as a threat remains, specific anti-terrorist legislation in respect both of terrorist offences and of procedures for preventing and detecting the commission of those offences. It might be helpful at this juncture if I remind the House of the remarks by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition when, as shadow Home Secretary, he spoke in the renewal debate in 1994:

"It is not in dispute, and never has been, that we need anti-terrorist legislation . . . We in the House share a total and complete abhorrence of terrorism and a desire to defeat it."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1994; Vol. 239, c. 300.]

It was of course the Labour Government who introduced the prevention of terrorism Act in 1974 and who ensured its renewal every year they were in government. Last year, we helped to ensure that the renewal order went through; we shall do so again this year. In government, so long as the terrorist threat remains and there is no lasting peace, we shall maintain and operate the powers in the PTA, with two changes with which I shall deal in a moment.

Last year, too, we showed our active support for anti-terrorist legislation when we ensured the rapid passage through this House and the other place of the Prevention of Terrorism (Additional Powers) Act. It gave the police additional powers, in clearly defined circumstances, of stop and search and of control of bomb threat areas. As it turned out, the legislation was more timely than might have been imagined by some. When I spoke to the police in Manchester after the bomb outrage, they told me that the additional powers had proved very useful.

The threat of terrorism comes not just from the Provisional IRA. Both the Rowe and Lloyd reviews spell out the much wider terrorist threat to which a great many countries, including the United Kingdom, are still subject. The Lloyd review contains a rather chilling statistic, at paragraph 1.8, to the effect that between 1990 and 1995

Europe's share of attacks by international terrorists rose from 18 per cent. of the world total to 62 per cent. of that total.

We have long been committed to two changes in the PTA. The first concerns the introduction of a judicial element in determining extensions of detention. At present, under section 14 of the PTA, a police officer may arrest and detain a suspect where there are reasonable grounds for believing that he may be concerned in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism.

By contrast, under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, arrest and detention in respect of a non-terrorist offence are possible only where there are reasonable grounds for suspecting the commission of a particular arrestable offence. Under section 14 of the PTA, reasonable suspicion goes much wider than the commission of a specific offence. Indeed, the phrase in section 14, as Lloyd pointed out, which refers to being concerned in the commission of an act of terrorism, is not in itself an offence.

Under PACE the initial detention may last for only 36 hours and may be extended only by decision of a magistrate for a further two and a half days, to make a total of four days. Under the PTA, however, the initial detention is for up to 48 hours. Thereafter, the detention may be extended for a further five days by decision of the Secretary of State, to make a total of seven days.

The case for a wider power of arrest and for potentially longer periods of detention than those laid down in PACE is a practical one connected with the particular nature of terrorist offences and their more complicated investigation. The argument is well aired by Lord Lloyd in chapter 8 of his review. He concludes that he has

"no doubt that [these powers] have been of great value to the police."

I do not in the least argue with that conclusion, but like so many before me, I argue that it is inappropriate for a decision about an extension of detention in these circumstances to be made by a Secretary of State, however careful and fair he may be, rather than by someone of judicial standing who is clearly independent of the Executive.

The present position is, in our judgment, wrong in principle and has brought us into conflict, as Lord Lloyd points out, with our obligations under the European convention on human rights, as a decision of that European Court in the Brogan case clearly established.

The European convention on human rights is one of the proudest creations that we have achieved for the whole of Europe. Our continued adherence to it is, happily, not a matter of party dispute. The Home Secretary told the House on 20 February that

"the advantages of our continued adherence to the European convention on human rights and to the European Court outweigh the disadvantages. Therefore, I think that we should continue to adhere to that convention."—[*Official Report*, 20 February 1997; Vol. 290, c. 1034.]

The need in principle for judicial involvement in PTA decisions has long been accepted by Ministers. In 1989 the then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), said:

"We continue to look for a judicial mechanism".—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1989; Vol. 146, c. 65.]

Lord Colville used to carry out the annual reviews of the PTA. He was of the resolute opinion that there should be judicial involvement, and he said so in his 1989 and 1990 reviews. He was succeeded a few years ago by Mr. John Rowe QC.

In past years, Mr. Rowe has argued against judicial involvement, but this year he said at paragraph 84 that his view had changed, not least because judges are now much more involved in one-sided, ex parte and secret hearings in respect of applications for public interest immunity certificates.

I understand the argument that the Secretary of State advanced—it has a familiar ring for those of us involved in discussions on the Police Bill—about the need not to embroil the judiciary, where there is not a good reason for doing so, in decisions that must be decided ex parte and might involve intelligence.

Mr. Rowe points out, as the reason for his change of mind, that

"Judges are now accustomed to hearing public interest immunity applications, in which the prosecution make an application for a judicial decision as to whether documents should be disclosed to the defence; often the prosecution's contention is that it should not make disclosure, on the ground that to do so would reveal the existence and identity of an informer or other sensitive material. One could well describe such material as 'intelligence'. Often it occurs that the defendant and his lawyers are not aware of the fact that such an application is being made; sometimes they know but are not present at it. The judge hears only the prosecution; and he hears details of the 'intelligence'."

Mr. Rowe was compelled by that argument to accept in principle that there should be judicial involvement in decisions on extensions of detention. Unfortunately, with reasoning that I frankly did not find convincing, he then concluded that, although a judicial element could be introduced in England and Wales, it could not be introduced in Northern Ireland.

Lord Lloyd also considered the issue and in his report he was firmly of the view that judicial decision should replace that of the Secretary of State in extensions of detention. Lord Lloyd makes practical proposals for achieving that. He said that, in England and Wales, it would be by the chief metropolitan stipendiary magistrate and that, in Scotland, by the sheriff principal of Lothian and the Borders. He added that, in Northern Ireland, there is

"at present no office which compares with these, and it might be necessary to create a new appointment".

As we all know, the whole of Lord Lloyd's recommendations are based on the assumption, which is written into his terms of reference, of a "lasting peace", but, as the Secretary of State has acknowledged, although some of Lord Lloyd's recommendations could not safely be introduced until a lasting peace, some can be and, in our judgment, that one should be. It is worth noting that Lord Colville was of the same view when terrorist outrages were at their height.

In government, we shall take an early opportunity to introduce that judicial element. That will be part of an overall strategy by us to ensure that the judicial system in all parts of the United Kingdom commands the greater confidence of all law-abiding citizens, including those of all communities in the north of Ireland.

Mr. Wilshire: I would be most grateful if the hon. Gentleman would confirm that I understand what he is

[Mr. Wilshire]

saying. Is he saying that he is prepared to overrule the recommendation of a practising lawyer, who has read all the papers and who understands the judicial process, not to involve the judicial process, even though the hon. Gentleman is not a lawyer and has not read the papers? Is he also saying that, although Lord Lloyd clearly says in his report that there is no question of anything in it being brought into effect until there is a permanent peace, the hon. Gentleman is prepared to ignore what Lord Lloyd says?

Mr. Straw: On the last point, the hon. Gentleman's attention may have wandered when the Secretary of State was speaking, but it is worth pointing out that he accepted that some of the recommendations by Lord Lloyd could perfectly safely be introduced in advance of any lasting peace. Ultimately, it is up to the House to decide, on the recommendation of Ministers, which parts should be accepted. There is no reason why the hon. Gentleman should know this fact, but I will correct him on one matter of personal detail and of some pride to me. I am legally qualified. Indeed, for a short and happy, although rather impecunious period, I practised at the Bar in chambers, which were headed by a then Conservative Member. I very much enjoyed that.

The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) also asks whether I intend to overrule the recommendations of Mr. Rowe. I do not believe that the issue of overruling his views comes into it. He makes recommendations. Time and again, and rightly, Ministers come to the House to deliver a report by someone who is independent and they say, "We accept this particular recommendation; we do not accept that recommendation." The report by a distinguished judge of the Scottish High Court, Lord Cullen, contained recommendations that both sides of the House accepted and recommendations that both sides refused to accept. If the hon. Gentleman has read Mr. Rowe's report, he will find that Mr. Rowe accepts the principle that change is needed and I accept that too. It is a view that we have taken for a long time. Moreover, I accepted the argument because I think that it was well made.

I simply do not follow the arguments of the hon. Member for Spelthorne in distinguishing between Northern Ireland and the mainland. It is also worth bearing in mind that Viscount Colville not only conducted the overall review of the legislation in 1987 but subsequently conducted a series of reviews of the Acts' operation. He concluded that, despite the fact that terrorist outrages by the IRA and others were continuing, there should be a judicial element in decisions on extensions of detention in Northern Ireland as well as on the mainland.

Mr. McNamara: Is my hon. Friend aware that the last time we debated this subject I welcomed his assurances on that specific point and on exclusion orders? I should be grateful if he will make it clear that we are not accepting Lord Lloyd's recommendations as infallible and that, under the next Labour Government, there will be a general examination of all civil liberties principles. Will he also tell us when he anticipates ending the current practice—in the first Queen's Speech? Presumably we will need amending legislation—unless the change is made by Order in Council under the Northern Ireland constitution, which might be possible. Where and when can we expect that change?

Mr. Straw: I will deal with those points in reverse order. I cannot give my hon. Friend the commitment that he seeks about the contents of a first Queen's Speech, except to say that I think that it will be a rather full Queen's Speech. If I am the Secretary of State, I will make the strongest bids that I can for Home Office matters. The second matter that he mentioned was on the Lloyd review. It would be an abdication of the responsibility of Ministers and of every other hon. Member, no matter how distinguished, simply to rubber-stamp a report. I do not think that any hon. Member subscribes to that proposition. At the end of my remarks, I will say how we will deal with Lord Lloyd's recommendations.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I should like to reiterate the point on commitments to review the civil liberties aspect of the matter. My principal opposition to the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 is that people can go missing for seven days. Not only is that an abuse of the criminal justice system but it results in miscarriages of justice. I welcome my hon. Friend's commitment to establish a judicial element in the matter, rather than requiring the Secretary of State's approval for holding people, but will he also undertake an examination of the periods that people can be held? Perhaps the period could again be set at four days, as provided in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which he mentioned. Will he also examine the possibility of notifying the families of those detained?

Mr. Straw: In chapter 8 of his report, in which he discusses current operation, Lord Lloyd considers at great length the issue of the period. There is no reason why my hon. Friend should have read Lord Lloyd—or re-read it, as I did yesterday—but it is the best exposition on why the investigation of terrorist offences is typically so much more complicated than in other, albeit very serious, non-terrorist offences. The report presents the practical argument on why the periods need to be longer while the current type of terrorist threat exists. I have made it clear that I accept that argument. However, that is all the more reason why extensions of detention which are considered to be wider and in excess of the powers provided in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 should be subject to judicial decision. I now believe that there is no reason for that not to be the case.

The second matter mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) was on providing information to suspects' families. That point is dealt with in successive Rowe reviews and in the Lloyd review. I believe that the practice has greatly improved in recent years. Unless there are overwhelming reasons—to do with further potential terrorism or threats—I believe that families should be informed of the whereabouts of suspects.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the two previous interventions from Labour Back Benchers give the impression that they perceive the essential threat to civil liberties to be posed by the legislation—which exists to protect individuals from

terrorism? Will he distance himself from that obvious nonsense? The manifest threat to civil liberties is from terrorism itself.

Mr. Straw: I thought that my hon. Friends the Members for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and for Leyton raised serious issues, which are matters of widespread concern. It is a matter of record that people who have taken the most strident attitude in opposing terrorism have expressed concerns about the absence of a judicial element in extending detention. One could hardly accuse Lord Lloyd of being soft on terrorism. He is a senior Law Lord and chairman of the Security Commission, and he resolutely holds the opinion that there is a need for a judicial element in such extensions. Another distinguished judge, Viscount Colville, held the same opinion. At the height of IRA terrorism, he said that there had to be a judicial element in extensions.

On the issue of civil liberties, I have always believed—I think that the belief is widely held on both sides of the House—that we should never stoop to the level of the terrorists, who deny civil rights to everyone. In the democratic Parliament of a democratic society, we must attempt to strike a balance. That was accepted by the then Home Secretary Roy Jenkins, now Lord Jenkins, when he introduced the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1974. When one has a threat that amounts to a declaration of war on a society, stringent measures—which would not be acceptable in normal circumstances—must be introduced. There must still be a balance, however, which is perhaps why we have come to a different view from the Secretary of State on extensions of detention and, as I shall explain in a moment, on exclusion orders.

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman quoted Lord Colville, who said:

"if we stoop to the level of terrorists and abandon altogether our fundamental liberties we have lost the battle against terrorism."

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, by its very nature, anti-terrorism legislation has been ad hoc legislation, to which further bits have been added as matters have changed? Elements were introduced separately from either the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) (Amendment) Acts or from the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts. Because of the nature of the past 25 years, perhaps that was the only way in which it could have been done.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if we are talking about the procedures identified by Lord Lloyd and attempting to achieve a peaceful situation, the House will have to have the vision to set up a completely new system of justice—one which will be able to command everyone's respect and protect civil and human liberties for all parts of this jurisdiction? Does he also agree that we will need a system that will not allow the abuses and wrongful convictions that we are seeing today, and one that will remove callousness and cynicism not only from terrorism itself, which is awful and atrocious, but from the administration of justice, which does make mistakes that fundamentally damage people's lives?

Mr. Straw: I accept a very great deal of what the hon. Gentleman says. As I said earlier, I think that it is crucial that we have the vision to build and strengthen institutions in all parts of the United Kingdom so that we can achieve a greater level of confidence in the judicial system among all communities. That is important, and I believe that that was what Viscount Colville was talking about when he spoke about the dangers of stooping to the level of the terrorists.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I also wish to pick up on the hon. Gentleman's point about stooping to the level of terrorists. Will he make it clear that when he talks about reform and repeal, he is not pandering to some of those on his Back Benches who support, endorse and encourage terrorists to the extent of bringing leading terrorists into this House? I refer, for example, to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who has never been slow to associate himself with the most outrageous members of the IRA. Will the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) confirm that reform and repeal must be about strengthening the law, not weakening it?

Mr. Straw: I defer to no one in my detestation of terrorism and my hostility to the IRA. I believe that that feeling is shared across the House. Picking up also on a point made by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), I shall deal in a moment with how, after 23 years of so-called temporary provisions, we must promptly establish some permanent arrangements that balance the need to deal with terrorism and the need to protect civil liberties.

The second change to which we have long been committed concerns exclusion orders. The orders apply only to Irish terrorism and amount to internal exile, which, I understand, was last practised in this country under Henry VIII. The effect of the orders is bizarre. We are one kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but a terrorist who is regarded as so dangerous that he may not be allowed anywhere on the mainland is allowed to walk freely in Northern Ireland. In reverse, a suspect may be banned from Belfast, but not from Canary Wharf or Manchester.

Lord Lloyd's unequivocal view was that exclusion orders should be removed from the statute book. His review, of course, was based on the assumption of a lasting peace. However, as I have already pointed out, the most recent full-scale review, by Lord Colville, was based on no such assumption. Terrorism then was at a continuing high level. Despite that, Lord Colville said that exclusion orders were

"the most draconian in the present Act".

He continued:

"I am not convinced that the ends justify the means . . . Exclusion orders should not be renewed or replaced."

He went on to say that removing exclusion orders from the statute book would be the correct decision

"both in terms of civil rights in the United Kingdom, and this country's reputation in that respect among the international community."

Although Mr. Rowe has supported the use of the orders, he acknowledged in his review last year that there were in the security forces

"a fair number of officers, of all ranks, who held the opposite view".

That is, they were against the orders. He went on to note that

"a known and experienced member of . . . terrorist organisations can be noticed at port and followed thereafter and kept under surveillance."

[Mr. Straw]

One striking aspect of this year's Rowe review is the reduction in the use of the orders. In 1988, there were 122 exclusion orders against entry to the mainland. When Mr. Rowe wrote his report, there were just 24 in force. As we have heard from the Secretary of State this afternoon, there are now only 23. No order has been made since 1994, despite the cessation of the ceasefire. In Northern Ireland, the Secretary of State has abandoned their use. He revoked all the then current orders in 1995 and none has been made since.

Last year, I repeated our long-standing opposition to the use of the orders. Their utility is open to question in the security forces and outside. Whatever their use—it cannot be much—it is far outweighed by the breach of basic human rights that they entail. In government, we shall implement Lord Colville's recommendations and neither renew nor replace the orders. Existing orders will be revoked as soon as practicable. We shall then take an early legislative opportunity to remove the power from the statute book.

I have made frequent references to the review conducted by Lord Lloyd of Berwick into the future of anti-terrorist legislation. I should like to conclude with some general remarks about the review. First, the House should be indebted to Lord Lloyd and to Mr. Justice Kerr for the thoroughness and clarity of their report, as well as to Professor Paul Wilkinson of Aberdeen university for his encyclopedic second volume. We called for such a review for three years, on the assumption of a lasting peace, and we were delighted when at last it was established.

Some of Lord Lloyd's recommendations, such as those to narrow the scope and time of detentions, could come safely into force only when a lasting peace has been achieved. Others, such as his proposals on forfeiture in section 13 of the current PTA, could sensibly be brought into force before that, and would assist the fight against terrorism.

There are two wider points. The first concerns the interaction of the PTA and PACE. Lord Lloyd says that if PACE had been in force in 1974,

"many of the procedural provisions contained in the PTA and the EPA might not have been necessary, or might have taken a different form."

He goes on to say that it is now possible to regard the PTA

"largely as a collection of modified PTA powers."

There will always be a need for special provisions to deal with terrorist offences, but they should, as far as possible, be part of a single arrest and detention code.

My second point leads on from that. At the end of his report, Lord Lloyd says that there should be public discussion of possible new powers and offences in advance of any future emergency that could prompt the introduction of further powers. Taking those two points together, we should not shelve the Lloyd report until a lasting peace has been achieved, but should begin a process of consultation on it to consider whether legislation could be drafted that would be robust and flexible enough to deal with a lasting peace in Northern Ireland and conditions in which a further emergency may arise. In government, I intend to start that process. Twenty-three renewals in 23 years have mocked the notion that the legislation is temporary.

The House is united in its determination to fight terrorism with every means consistent with a democratic nation founded on the rule of law. The provisions of anti-terrorist legislation are tough and, in many ways, unpalatable, but they are necessary to deter and defeat those who, in Lord Lloyd's words,

"seek to wage war on society"

and they have our support.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Before I call anyone else to speak, I remind the House that the debate must end at 7 o'clock. It would therefore be prudent if speeches were shorter rather than longer.

5.27 pm

Mr. Richard Needham (North Wiltshire): I shall try to assist you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am encouraged in some way that three more hon. Members are present for this, my last speech in the House, than there were for my maiden speech 18 years ago. On the other hand, perhaps that is one of the reasons why I have decided to leave.

This is the first debate on security in Northern Ireland in which I have participated, although I was the longest-serving Northern Ireland Minister. Having listened to the debate, I do not think that I would have noticed much difference as year followed year if I had participated in the earlier ones.

Many hon. Members are more knowledgeable than I am about security matters. That may say something about me. It may also say something about the esoteric nature of security issues in Northern Ireland. Many security issues are clouded in secrecy. Secrecy is clearly important in dealing with terrorism, but I do not believe that all of it is always necessary.

All hon. Members have accepted that no security solution will, on its own, halt the violence that leads to misery in the Province. If there is to be an end to violence, and if a solution is to be found—I hope that I shall be allowed to draw a little on my experiences at the Northern Ireland Office, although they did not include responsibility for security—it will be because of economic and social improvement for all the people of Northern Ireland, because of a political strategy that can lead over time to a political agreement and because of tough, fair and responsible Army and police pressure against violence.

I do not believe that a social and economic solution or a political strategy will work without the adoption of a successful and sensitive security policy by both the Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Social and economic, political and security matters are the three legs of the stool that I discussed with my colleagues and other Northern Ireland Members when I was a Northern Ireland Minister.

The 1980s saw a dramatic change in the social and economic opportunities for Northern Ireland. It was also a time of political change. I think that the social and economic changes were welcomed, and enjoyed broad cross-community support, but I cannot say the same of the political changes. On the social and economic side, the money that was spent to improve housing, and the establishment of the Housing Executive, transformed one of the core grievances of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. To its credit, the Housing Executive has effectively taken housing out of politics in Northern Ireland.

I accept that the Fair Employment Act and the Anglo-Irish Agreement left many scars on the Unionist community, but I continue to believe that those two measures will be the foundation stones if the Catholic community is to gain the trust required to make Northern Ireland work. I accept that others will not agree.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I take this opportunity—I may not have another—to put on record the respect and affection with which he is regarded, as the longest-serving Northern Ireland Minister, in the north of Ireland. Does the right hon. Gentleman have any views about intercepted telephone conversations being used in evidence, especially in a political context?

Mr. Needham: I have many views on that subject, but the hon. Gentleman will have to wait for the publication of my book to discover them.

I understand the Unionist opposition to political moves, but in the face of that opposition and problems with Sinn Fein in the council chamber, partnership and power sharing in Northern Ireland councils had increased from five to 17 councils by the early 1990s. The process was assisted by the efforts of the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis). There was no question but that, by the early 1990s, social and economic progress and political partnerships were having an effect across the length and breadth of Northern Ireland.

It was my ambition to involve people—as much as possible under the political constraints within which we operated—in the decisions that mattered to them at every level and at every opportunity. Partnership is an overworked word, but it was the essence of all that we tried to do in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. We introduced initiatives such as Making Belfast Work, the Belfast festival, the Tall Ships, Making Derry Work, "There's Something in the Air", and the Carrickfergus initiative. There were developments at Coalisland and Belleek, which were supported by the International Fund for Ireland, and the redevelopment of Armagh. Marks and Spencer opened a store in Ballymena. We conserved and restored the centre of Downpatrick; twinned Newry and Pittsburgh; introduced the Tyrone initiative, with which the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone and I were involved; and there were the Derry-Boston ventures.

Those initiatives, and countless others, were put in place in an attempt to involve local people and, most important, councillors and Members of Parliament. We gave them the opportunity to do what they do best: promote their communities in Northern Ireland on the United Kingdom mainland and across the world. They were very good at that.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). It is not a cosy tribute. I am not one of those who say that, in Northern Ireland, the best fail to go into politics. I think that those from Northern Ireland who go into politics—whatever community they represent—are immensely and enormously brave, when confronted on both sides by violence and potential terrorism. There are not too many Rev. Ian Paisleys in Hampshire, Seamus Mallons in Wiltshire or David Trimbles in Buckinghamshire. I hope that the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) will not mind my saying that he would do a little better in his new role if he did not occasionally look like a Christmas tree and jump around like a dervish in front of the television cameras. The people who represent Northern Ireland in this House are all remarkable in their own way, and it has been a pleasure to work with them. We enjoyed a degree of trust in our working relationship.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Although I am reluctant to intervene on the right hon. Gentleman, he must now relate his points—which I assumed to be background material—to the issue at hand.

Mr. Needham: They were background points, Madam Deputy Speaker. My point is that, because we achieved those changes together, we were able to bring the men of violence towards our debate and away from their agenda of trying to secure change by revolutionary means. We discussed jobs and opportunities for Northern Ireland's long-term future.

The situation has not changed altogether, even after the traumas of the past year. Mr. Adams is promoting himself in the local newspapers as someone who delivers results for west Belfast. The advertisements claim:

"Gerry Adams is working for West Belfast on a full time basis".

I hope that someone has told the Department of Health and Social Services about that. He claims that he is responsible for investments by F. G. Wilson and investments in Springvale. He even claims that he identified the Springvale investment site. Developments in west Belfast have occurred despite Mr. Adams. I do not know what he thinks he did for jobs in west Belfast by blowing up Mackies.

The Springvale project was my initiative and that of the Department of the Environment and the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron), who I am sorry is not in his place today. He has worked tirelessly to lobby, cajole and bully Northern Ireland Ministers, the United States and the European Union to provide assistance. Wherever the hon. Gentleman and I went, we found that the image of Mr. Adams deterred potential investors. The Industrial Development Board offered the highest grant to firms locating in west Belfast because the local Member of Parliament was an apologist for terrorists. The only jobs that Mr. Adams has brought to west Belfast are in the undertaking business. The only assurances that he can give to those who come to west Belfast are that his henchmen will not blow up those who come in, but they will kneecap those who try to break in.

If Mr. Adams had wanted to help the people of west Belfast, he would have taken his seat in this place when he was a Member of Parliament. I do not know how he thinks he can do anything in the United States when he does not have a visa, and he would not be welcome anywhere in Brussels. He has done nothing for the people of west Belfast—he certainly did nothing for them when I was in the Province. The people of west Belfast have a very good Member of Parliament at present, and they should hang on to him.

Perhaps one of the most disappointing and difficult aspects of the task that we undertook in the 1980s in bringing people together was our attempt to involve the Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary in our activities. Of course, there were exceptions—General John Wilsey fully understood the strategy of the three-legged stool—

[Mr. Needham]

but the security forces generally followed their own agenda, about which the rest of us knew little. We tried to involve them: I sent my officials to the RUC stations seeking to include them at every level. We were quite successful. For example, the local police were interested in what we were doing. Nevertheless, the consequences of that separateness were difficult. At best, we were confronted with the "safe" option when we went to the security forces for advice and help.

We were told that we could not have litter bins in Royal avenue, because bombs might be placed in them. On the face of it, that is perfectly reasonable—but the IRA placed bombs in shops, not litter bins. As a result, we had burnt-out shops and litter all over the streets. We were told that we could not plant trees because the iron railings around them could be used as stakes. We were told that we could not lay cobblestones, although Belfast is full of them, in case they were ripped up and used as bricks.

There were arguments for such a stance, but we were trying to achieve normalcy and to bring people from both communities back to the centre of the cities, where they could work, eat, drink and occasionally go to bed together, and that was not easy when we were constantly being constrained. It was worse than that, because there was no clear political leadership.

I spent an enormous amount of time trying to assist Coalisland, which was at the centre of IRA terrorism and had a Sinn Fein presence. When information about my trip there was leaked to the IRA, a remarkable RUC inspector said that he would carry me in on his shoulders if necessary to show the people of Coalisland that we were trying to help them. Having spent an immense amount of time, money and effort trying to achieve that objective, within three months of my leaving, the Parachute Regiment went through Coalisland and would have undone in one night everything that we had put together in two years. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone who, with Jim Canning and others locally, managed to maintain the community initiative that we had worked so hard to achieve.

I asked Lord Prior, the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether during his time in office he had any involvement with the regiments that were chosen to go to Northern Ireland. He told me that he never had any involvement: it was always the decision of the Secretary of State for Defence. That was true in my time, too.

These matters are of major importance when we consider the continuance order and how security and policing should be undertaken in Northern Ireland. That brings me to what happened at Drumcree. Even if we allow for the fact that there was manipulation by bad men on both sides—and goodness me there was enough of it—we should recognise that the lack of political leadership led to a developing loss of confidence between the communities, and a lack of confidence in the RUC and the Government.

The Government seemed to say that policing was an operational matter and had nothing to do with them. The Chief Constable said that if the two communities wanted to fight each other, there was nothing he could do to stop them. As a result, we are debating this matter today. The consequences have been dire for the people of Ulster. They are paying for those mistakes, although they are not responsible for them. The people of Northern Ireland have no say in who governs them. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) was right to talk about Manchester: he said that one had to see it to believe it. That happened once in Manchester: it happened every month in Belfast, month after month, year after year. I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not take this as a rebuke, but I suggest that he would be wise to mention as well the destruction in Belfast, because people may think that he does not understand what happens in Northern Ireland.

The people of Northern Ireland are being held responsible and are being forced to pay for mistakes that are none of their making. The vast majority of people of Northern Ireland want nothing to do with terrorism: it terrorises them. The IRA's activities have resulted in more murders in the Catholic community than in the Protestant community, and the Protestant community has suffered enough. Their health budget is being cut to pay for things that have nothing to do with them.

When I was Minister responsible for the health service in Northern Ireland, the health budget was 25 per cent. more than that for England, and for good reason: because of the levels of morbidity, deprivation and unemployment. The health budget was the same as that for Scotland. Expenditure in Scotland is now 30 per cent. higher than in England, whereas expenditure in Northern Ireland is only 13 per cent. higher, so it is 17 per cent. lower than in Scotland.

It cannot be right that the old and the ill of Northern Ireland have to pay for the mistakes of the Government, who are responsible for security, when the people have no say in the political affairs of their Province. The effect of that will be to widen the divisions and to produce an even greater lack of confidence in the Government.

I have always maintained that, if terrorists strike in Northern Ireland to the detriment of the people, the Government should be determined to rebuild what has been destroyed better than it was before. That is how to galvanise people and bring communities together to fight terrorism.

Security is the responsibility of the British Government, supported by the Government of the Republic. It is up to the Government to co-ordinate the policies that make up the three legs of the stool that I described. They need the Republic's support to do that. The police and the Army must be engaged in the social and economic and political initiatives that the rest of us are trying to make a success in Northern Ireland. All three legs of that stool, while interdependent, are designed to help overcome violence. That means asking for the opinions and listening to the advice of those responsible and knowledgeable in the Northern Ireland civil service and in the community at large, and acting on that advice. I am delighted to say that the new Chief Constable seems to understand that, and he must be supported in his efforts to integrate the three policies more closely.

In the last few months of my time in Northern Ireland, we put in place institutional arrangements to achieve that integration, which have since been disbanded. Tough and difficult decisions will have to be made on both sides of the border in both communities if the present appalling levels of personal violence and intimidation are to be dealt with. That cannot happen unless both communities and their leaders understand the need for those measures.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland must be open with them, open with the Republic and in charge of what is going on.

Whatever my concerns about the difficulty of integrating the police and the Army into the Government machine and strategy, the breakdown of the ceasefire is the sole responsibility of Sinn Fein-IRA. No one has done more for peace than the Prime Minister. It is obscene to suggest that he is to blame for any breakdown, when he is the first Prime Minister in 25 years to show real determination to do something. We are here today because the IRA has us here. The IRA's return to violence is perverse.

If the ceasefire proved anything, it proved that, without violence, the economic border disappears. Londonderry becomes the hub of the north-west. Elderly people move there from Donegal or County Londonderry because of the facilities available in the city. Hospitals in the north-west start to rationalise their differing and overlapping services. Planning, power generation and tourism have no boundaries. When the economic border disappears—there is no police, no Army, no customs—social integration is bound to follow. After social and economic integration, political change is bound to come. I do not know what that political change will be, because it may take years. When that change comes, it will be built on mutual respect for the differing traditions and cultures of Ireland's communities, both north and south.

I know that violence enshrines hatred and division, but it also enshrines the border. It enshrines a border somewhere in the north of Ireland whether the loyalists constitute 60 per cent. of the population or 40 per cent. The IRA is primarily responsible for the violence. It is to blame for the divisions within Northern Ireland and within Ireland. If the IRA really wants to get rid of the border, all it has to do is get rid of violence. Until it does that, it will remain the implacable enemy of all of us who live in the British Isles.

5.50 pm

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): I begin by correcting something said by the right hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Needham). He referred to the bombing incident in Manchester last year. For his information and for the information of the House, I should say that Manchester has been the subject of one or two previous acts of terrorism such as incendiary bombs and other incidents. Those incidents are on the record and I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman is not aware of them and thinks that such things occur only in Belfast. However, I do not want to labour that point.

It is a great tragedy that the House should have to debate the PTA. All hon. Members wish that we did not need such powers. The strength of the House is revealed when hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber defend personal liberties. The Home Secretary should not get too sensitive when Labour Members question certain aspects. I believe that when there are evil people carrying out evil deeds, there must be powers of some sort. I am not saying that these measures are perfect, but, whoever the Government, something would be necessary.

Acts of terrorism are carried out by organisations other than just the IRA. Terrorism now occurs on a massive scale internationally. Only today I received a letter from a constituent complaining bitterly about acts of terrorism in the middle east, where 10 Christians have been assassinated. The letter asked me to intervene with the Foreign Office and so on. We cannot allow terrorism to take over democracy, but, if we are not careful, it will happen. We need to take a grip on society.

Coming closer to home, it saddens me when I reflect on certain parts of Ireland where communities are being controlled by Mafia-type systems and where there is no democracy. It is bad for the community and I dread to think what it must be like for young children born into such a community. The secret Mafia-type control stymies any progress towards a better society.

I was pleased to note in the report on the PTA that the banks are increasingly playing their part by becoming more vigilant about money laundering. We all know that terrorists rely heavily on funding and the less money they have, the fewer dirty deeds they can carry out.

There is no use kidding ourselves about the fact that people are demanding better security, and we are here to reflect the views of those who elect us. There is a growing awareness and that is appreciated nowhere more than in my city of Manchester. Paragraph 18 on page nine of the report refers to major damage and explosions in cities, and a classic example of that is what occurred in Manchester on 15 June 1996.

We were shocked by the hatred poured on to the city. We have always prided ourselves on good relationships with north and south Ireland. We have exchanges with them and there are plenty of Irish people living in the city. We were shocked by what happened to us. It was a dastardly and cold-blooded act by evil people. It happened at about 11 o'clock on a Saturday morning in a busy part of central Manchester, which was peopled mostly by women and children doing their shopping. Do not let us kid ourselves and say that it was a rebellion against the system intended only to damage property. The bomb was placed right in the centre of the population—about 80,000 were going about their business and enjoying themselves. They were shattered by that dirty, evil and unforgivable act. What I saw in the aftermath—women and children pouring with blood and having to be evacuated—is engraved on my heart.

I have seen the site several times and it was a miracle that nobody was killed. A total of 200 people were seriously injured, hospitalised or traumatised. They were mainly women and children—innocent kids who did not know anything about it. A 3,300 lb bomb was placed in the centre of ordinary people. As a result, 100,000 sq m of retail and office space was immediately lost in my city and hundreds of innocent people lost their jobs. A total of 670 businesses were destroyed and a further consequence was the loss of £5 million in revenue from car parking.

Figures vary as to the total cost, but I made some inquiries today in Manchester town hall and was told that the estimated cost is £430 million. The private sector has provided £350 million towards that cost and the public sector has provided £80 million, which includes £43 million from the Government and £20 million from Europe.

I must tell the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister that we do not believe that this is a Manchester problem: it is the nation's problem. It is not on for the ratepayers

[Mr. Ken Eastham]

of Manchester to have to pick up such a massive bill. We cannot contain it. We have not been treated in the best way.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I intervene mainly to endorse the hon. Gentleman's point that there is an obligation on the state to ensure that when people suffer damage of such a nature, they receive compensation. It is particularly appropriate to consider those in private houses such as the hundreds of houses near the Canary Wharf site, some of which have not been fully repaired. Does the hon. Gentleman think that it would be better if the Government had simply extended to the whole of the United Kingdom the legislation that exists in Northern Ireland to provide compensation for criminal injuries and criminal damage, so that the cost, fell on the state rather than on private individuals or the local authority?

Mr. Eastham: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. When we met the Deputy Prime Minister after the bombing, I recall that we put those points to him. The bomb had a serious effect on small businesses, because many of them were not insured. Marks and Spencer and other large, wealthy companies can withstand such losses—although I do not say that they should have to—but small businesses cannot afford to pay high insurance premiums. Many of those small family businesses will never open again, and the city will be the poorer, because the variety of shopping in the centre was a big attraction.

It seems to me that there are two standards in the House. If we compare the compensation paid to farmers for the bovine spongiform encephalopathy problem—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is going very wide of the order before us tonight, which is primarily to consider the merits or otherwise of continuing the arrangements for suppressing terrorism.

Mr. Eastham: I appreciate that, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I am referring to the report, which mentions explosions. I am taking the opportunity to expand and elaborate on what the report does not tell the House and the rest of the country. I think it is reasonable to make one or two comments on that.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has already made those one or two comments. I have tried to be generous.

Mr. Eastham: There seems to be some attempt to stop my speech. I say to the Home Secretary that if the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food can pay £3.5 billion to the farmers, it is not unreasonable for the Government to dig deeper to help with the costs of the bombing incidents in Manchester, London and Northern Ireland. We have two standards for compensation, and more assistance should be given to those who suffer from the effects of bombings.

I received a letter today from the Department of the Environment informing me that Manchester would share £2.5 million with Tower Hamlets to cover some of the costs of the bombings. I sincerely believe that that is only a drop in the bucket, given the devastation and problems that we faced.

It would be remiss of me if I did not mention the behaviour of the Manchester services in the crisis. I wish to put on record our admiration for the Greater Manchester police force. Chief Superintendent Peter Harris and his team did a marvellous job with great calmness. Their actions were an example to all police forces elsewhere in the country. I also wish to mention the ambulance service and the hospitals. Their response was of the highest order, and they have the greatest admiration of the people of my city.

I also wish to mention Manchester town hall which effectively provided resources during the crisis. The lord mayor, Councillor Derek Shaw, had taken office only about three weeks before and had to deal with the disaster and all the media people descending on him. He did his job with great dignity, and he has made his contribution to the funding by setting up a special fund.

There are lessons to be learnt from the bombing. The Home Secretary must take a fresh look at security. We need more security cameras with better image recognition. We must also reconsider the road systems in shopping areas. I recognise that some powers are needed and that we must have an Act. I do not know whether we have the right Act, but we need something. People are entitled to live without fear and that should be the purpose of the Act.

6.4 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): The case for renewal of the Act goes far wider than Northern Ireland, but I shall confine my remarks to the affairs of the Province. Most of us who speak on such occasions hope that every speech will be the last, but—as I have said in the past—I fear that that is not to be, for reasons that I will mention in a moment.

I have no doubt that renewal is unavoidable this year. Mr. Rowe's report makes that clear. He refers to 15 terrorist murders and several mortar attacks in the past year. I would add to the list the hundreds of acts of torture and punishment beatings that took place. I classify those as terrorism just as much as mortar attacks and murder.

Mr. Rowe's conclusion is simple: the Act's powers remain necessary. I regret that as, I am sure, does the House, but the powers remain necessary and must be kept on the statute book. Since we last debated the Act and renewed the powers, Lord Lloyd's report has been published. I hope that we can follow the recommendations in that report as quickly as possible. It is important to note that, when the time comes for us to follow the recommendations, we realise that the report confirms that some form of anti-terrorism legislation will remain necessary. I agree. So much for those Labour Members who claim that we do not need a prevention of terrorism Act. The report gives the lie to that assertion.

Whatever the future may hold, we clearly still have terrorism in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. It gives me no pleasure to say that I see little prospect of that terrorism ending in the near future. If that is so, it is essential that we do not drop our guard and it is vital that we do not abandon the Act. It is also important that we guard against being tricked into thinking that progress has been made in Northern Ireland, when it patently has not. I have in mind the woolly thinking that says that we can equate progress towards peace in Northern Ireland with the reinstatement of the so-called ceasefire declared by Sinn Fein-IRA.

The original Sinn Fein-IRA so-called ceasefire was not progress and was no reason to abandon the powers in the Act. It was nothing more than a tactical manoeuvre. It was never a real step towards the permanent peace that we need before the recommendations in Lord Lloyd's report can be implemented. If we look back over the past year, the reality of the so-called ceasefire becomes clear. The ceasefire that is being used as an argument for progress happened because Sinn Fein-IRA was facing oblivion. They needed time to regroup and re-equip, to recruit and train again, and to target again. They needed time to try to wrong-foot the Government.

During the whole period of the so-called ceasefire that we are now being asked to fall for again, Sinn Fein-IRA was planning and building the Canary Wharf bomb. During that period there were also seven terrorist murders. Some ceasefire. Some reason for thinking that the powers in the Act are not necessary.

We need look no further than that temporary so-called ceasefire for justification for the Act, and for making it crystal clear that reinstating it would not be enough to make the Act unnecessary. In connection with Northern Ireland, I judge that the Act will continue to be necessary until we make some real progress towards permanent peace. When we debate the Act and say that it must stay in place until there is progress, we must make it clear what we mean by progress. I believe that three things will have to happen before we no longer need to debate the renewal of the Act. First, there must be an end to all violence, not just some violence. Last time there was simply a reduction in the number of murders, and torture continued. Reinstating that position will not be sufficient to make the Act unnecessary.

Secondly, there must be a verifiable declaration that all violence has ended for ever. The weasel words that we heard last time simply will not be enough to make renewing the Act cease to be a fact of life.

The third thing that must happen before we can stop having the annual debates is a decommissioning of all arms and explosives. I must make it clear that I direct those remarks not at Sinn Fein-IRA alone; they apply equally to all terrorism. Terrorism is evil and there can be no compromise with it. I draw no distinction, and I do not believe that anybody in the House will wish to do so.

I realise that some hon. Members will simply say that I am being unrealistic. However, it is just as unrealistic to expect, if that is what their argument will be, that the ordinary, decent law-abiding people of Northern Ireland will take the reinstatement of a so-called ceasefire at face value. It is unreasonable and unrealistic to expect democratic politicians, either in Northern Ireland or here, to sit down with people who have guns in their pockets and Semtex in their briefcases.

It follows from all that that I am clear in my mind that the Act remains necessary, and will continue to be necessary until some progress is made. I am afraid that that will be the case for some time to come, so I urge the whole House to vote for the Act to continue.

6.13 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate, although inevitably it is on a sad subject—perhaps the saddest that I have had the chance to debate in my four years in the House. Freedom of the individual is, of course, important to people in my party—but, as I am sure the whole House accepts, freedom of the individual must never override other people's individual freedoms. That is why, in current circumstances, my party believes that, sadly, the Act is still needed and should be renewed for a further year.

It is important to keep our ideas about the legislation in proportion. It should not be seen as the solution to the problems in Northern Ireland. That solution will come, if it ever does, not through the Act but through political developments—through talks and a new, widely acceptable settlement. Security legislation is not adequate to deal with anything other than purely security issues. To treat it as a panacea would be to elevate the terrorists to a status well above their due.

Since the Canary Wharf bombing on 9 February last year, the IRA has continued a series of outrages. There have been other villains in the case, too, but inevitably we shall all agree that the IRA and the atrocities that it has committed are the main problem. It is fair to give a note of tribute to the former loyalist terrorists who have resisted the temptation to reactivate their terrorism.

Mr. Allason: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the Provisional IRA is the main problem, is he not overlooking the other bombs in London? There was the Saudi bomb outside the newspaper office, and the most recent prosecution of Palestinian terrorists, for the bomb outside the Israeli embassy.

Mr. Rendel: I certainly do not overlook other terrorism, and I shall refer to it briefly later.

I was sounding a note of praise for the former loyalist terrorists who have shown considerable restraint in the face of great provocation over the past year or two. They have avoided the trap set for them by the IRA, which has been trying to tempt them back into violence. Had they fallen into that trap, the only winners would have been the IRA.

A further note of praise is due to the security services, which have scored several notable successes over the past year, and which, according to the Rowe report, have been exercising their powers with considerable restraint.

I shall now talk about the individual aspects of the legislation, starting with one of the most crucial but also one of the most controversial—the exclusion orders. The Rowe report makes it clear that the power is wide. It is interesting that no new exclusion orders were applied during 1996—as a result of which, the number of those against whom exclusion orders are outstanding has fallen considerably.

The power to make an exclusion order is a strong power, consigning people to what may seem to some of them like internal exile, despite the fact that many of them have not been convicted of any offence. It could be said, and I have some sympathy with the view, that the existence of the exclusion order implies that it is okay to be a terrorist in Northern Ireland, but one cannot be a terrorist on the mainland. That is a worrying aspect of the power.

I would be interested to know why the Government felt that only half the exclusion orders needed to be reviewed last year. In the light of the number of orders that were not renewed, there is a strong case to be made for reviewing all the orders in place every year.

[Mr. Rendel]

As for the detention legislation, the recent Bridgewater Four case has highlighted some of the dangers of keeping people in detention. Extended periods of detention can cause havoc, even to the most settled minds, and can lead some people into thinking that things are true when they are not, and sometimes even into confessing to crimes that they have not committed. We must therefore be careful in our use of detention. I am happy to say that considerable restraint seems to have been used, as is clear from the report. I am happy that there has been maximum restraint; indeed, that is the minimum that can be expected.

Closed circuit television has been mentioned already today, and it is mentioned in the Rowe report, too. It must be a powerful and effective way of improving security, especially at ports and airports. It is an impressive technological advance. The Home Secretary has recently visited the CCTV scheme in my constituency, and I know that he was impressed by it.

CCTV can be useful both in tracing terrorists and other criminals after the event, and as a deterrent, to stop people committing such offences, because they think that they are much more likely to be caught if they do.

It is true, as the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) said, that terrorism should not be seen in the context of Northern Ireland alone, although the balance of the debate and of the Rowe report confirms the fact that the legislation has been mainly concerned with, and of use in, Northern Ireland.

Professor Paul Wilkinson makes it clear in the second volume of Lord Lloyd's report that international terrorism is certainly not on the decline and that, if anything, it is increasing. There is therefore a good case to be made for having some legislation to deal with that aspect of the problem, but it is arguable that the legislation before us is not the best way of doing that, especially when we consider that 569 people were detained under the legislation for incidents in Northern Ireland, of whom 155 were subsequently charged, but only two were detained for terrorist activities not related to Northern Ireland, neither of whom was charged.

I am glad to see that for the first time the section of John Rowe's report that deals with human rights has been expanded into a whole chapter. A balance obviously needs to be struck between the measures needed to combat terrorism and the possible infringement of civil rights.

There is widespread support in Northern Ireland among all parties for a Bill of Rights. That constitutional innovation could stop the United Kingdom being dragged embarrassingly through the European Court of Human Rights and could kick-start further discussions at Stormont and provide a useful counterbalance to some of the powerful legislation before us. I urge the next Home Secretary, whoever it may be, to deal with that issue immediately on assuming office.

The legislation is a regrettable necessity. It is a powerful antibiotic to the bacteria of terrorism, but it must be administered only as long as is necessary. My party believes that it is still needed for a further year, even though we have never had much enthusiasm for it. Most hon. Members of all parties would agree that we pass this legislation without much enthusiasm, merely because we believe that it is needed for the time being, and most of us fervently hope that it will not be needed for much longer.

6.21 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I welcome Mr. Rowe's finding that

"those who use the Act do so with care and responsibility."

I would like to quarrel—but I cannot—with his analysis that

"the present situation both as to Northern Ireland and the international field reveals a continuing threat of terrorism"

and I endorse his conclusion that there is

"a need of the provisions of the Act"

noting that he refers to all its provisions.

In passing, I welcome the strong emphasis on the threat of international terrorism. Mr. Rowe writes that the threat is as great as ever and acknowledges that even if Irish and Northern Ireland issues were resolved, there would be a continuing need for the Act. Like other hon. Members, I have felt some frustration in the past at the slow progress in getting at the funding of terrorism, so I take particular satisfaction in Mr. Rowe's reporting of movement on that front.

I shall be ultra-selective in dealing with the two main points in the speech of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw): judicial participation in extensions of detention, and exclusion orders.

I have an open mind on judicial participation. The hon. Gentleman has not yet convinced me that he is right, and I am more persuaded by the arguments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I was surprised by Mr. Rowe's sudden Damascus road conversion in the course of the past 12 months. A year ago Mr. Rowe described judicial participation as

"unusual . . . a straining of the judicial function"

and argued that a judge acting in that capacity would be acting

"in name only . . . exercising a function which could be called judicial only because he happened to be a judge by his profession and occupation."

That has all changed.

The hon. Member for Blackburn has not convinced me, but I find Mr. Rowe's reasoning even more confusing. He gives three reasons why judicial participation should not take place in Northern Ireland but could, by implication, take place in England and Wales.

The first reason is that judges in Northern Ireland could not be asked to hear the extension of detention applications, because if they took part in them they would be regarded as an arm of the Executive. The second reason is that there are many more such applications in Northern Ireland than in the remainder of the United Kingdom, and the third is that

"extensions of detention are an obvious part of the process of arrest . . . and detention in holding centres."

The first point would apply wherever judges participate in the process, because the function is the same whether it is in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland or Wales, so it is a strange argument. The argument concerning numbers is irrelevant, as it is the principle and practice that matter, regardless of the number of occasions on which judicial participation might take place. The third argument refers to a situation that is precisely the same in all parts of the United Kingdom. I am confused by Mr. Rowe's arguments as the two valid reasons that he offers for non-participation in Northern Ireland apply equally to other parts of the United Kingdom.

I believe that the hon. Member for Blackburn is wrong about exclusion orders. He has failed to appreciate that their selective use is a key element in our anti-terrorist measures. He referred to paragraph 48 of the report, which says that some people have said that

"it is better to allow known terrorists to enter the country and to follow them and so discover their associates and equipment."

That might be the case in some circumstances, but the best way in which to pursue matters at any time is an operational decision and the option of exclusion orders should be there.

The hon. Member for Blackburn has often claimed that the effects of exclusion orders are bizarre, but I do not believe that he appreciates the fact that the overwhelming majority of terrorist acts do not merely happen but are the outcome of weeks, months or even years of planning and preparation, and that restricting the movement of key individual players can play havoc with that process of planning and preparation.

By the use of exclusion orders, we can irreparably damage the terrorists' command and communications structures and practices, deter terrorist activity by letting terrorists know that our intelligence gathering is effective, prevent specific terrorist operations which involve movement from one part of the United Kingdom to another, and in many instances effectively remove individuals from front-line terrorist active service.

The hon. Member for Blackburn did not adequately address Mr. Rowe's support for exclusion orders: the report refers unequivocally to their effectiveness. Nor did the hon. Gentleman consider that, if the option of exclusion orders were no longer available, the security need that they seek to satisfy would not vanish and would have to be addressed by other means. If we did not have the orders, we could well have a considerable increase in detentions on intelligence and detentions for intelligence, which many would regard as undesirable, and the argument for the reintroduction of internment would be the stronger.

Last year, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said:

"The need for the exclusion power is proven. It is effective. It is an essential weapon in the counter-terrorist armoury and it would be irresponsible to relinquish it."—[*Official Report*, 14 March 1996; Vol. 273, c. 1131.]

I am convinced that he is right.

The fundamental point of this debate is to recall that the primary function and duty of the state is to protect persons and property. If the state does not do that, there is a grave danger that individuals will start doing it for themselves. There are two unacceptable extremes of policy: a wait-to-be-bombed policy and a shoot-to-kill policy. We must find the formula that balances civil liberties with civil defence. It is my belief that we have it right.

6.28 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I have been asked to speak for no longer than five minutes. I shall comply with that request, but I feel somewhat miffed that we do not have adequate time to discuss the continuance order before us. I find no fault with those who have spoken before me; they have had important things to say on a very important issue.

I listened with interest to what was said by the right hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Needham), who was a very good Northern Ireland Minister, although I am not sure that I entirely agree with his philosophy as to the causes and effects of terrorism. I could not but be touched by the emotion with which the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) spoke of the devastation in his city.

On the basis of what I have heard—and, indeed, on the basis of some of what I have read in Mr. John Rowe's report—I believe that there is still a lack of understanding in the House of the nature of terrorism. Hon. Members tell me that the solution must be a mixture of security, economic and social measures. Economic and social measures are important in every part of the kingdom, but they are not part of the solution to the problem of terrorism, because terrorism is not spontaneous: it does not derive from the denial of a particular right to a particular person or, indeed, a particular group of people.

In the past 25 years, inequities that used to exist in Northern Ireland have been put right time and again and I believe that we now have more checks and balances in our system than any other country in the western world. Yet terrorism thrives, because it is not spontaneous: it is strategic, and the IRA in particular is determined to fulfil its political and sectarian aspirations. Let us make no mistake about this: the IRA is more sectarian than political. We need only consider the murders along the frontier of the only sons of Protestant farmers who are getting old. We need only consider the Kingsmills murders. A vanload of workers was stopped, the Catholic member was stood to one side and the eight Protestants were gunned down.

That is what we are dealing with in terms of IRA terrorism: we are dealing with sectarianism at its worst. If we want to overcome that, we must do so in two ways. First, we must devise a counter-strategy of which the prevention of terrorism Act is part—a counter-strategy that has never been developed fully. Secondly, we must look at the community as a whole. We must take account of the 85 per cent. or perhaps 90 per cent. of the population, decent people who eschew violence, and make them aware of their obligation to oppose the terrorists.

I must leave the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) time to speak. Let me say, however, that the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) spoke very sensibly about the Act. He apologised for it—I do not know why—saying that it was regrettable but necessary for another year. The IRA's strategy, however, is to maintain the present position for as long as it can withstand the resolve of the rest of us. I do not apologise for the Act: I believe that it must stay, and that it must be strengthened by whichever party comes to power after 1 May.

One of the important things that we must do is to reintroduce the broadcasting ban. I will tell the House one thing: Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and all those evil people will have more prime time this week on television and radio than I have had time to debate this important issue here at the heart of democracy.

6.34 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Because of time constraints, I too will be very selective. I think that it was on 10 March 1993 that, through the generosity of

[Mr. Seamus Mallon]

my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), I had two minutes in which to speak in a debate on this subject; I have five minutes tonight. There are points—some of them philosophical—that I would like to put to the Secretary of State, but I simply do not have time.

Let me address one point that was touched on earlier. It is possible to share people's objectives while disagreeing totally with their means of attaining those objectives. I share the Secretary of State's objective, and the objective of the House, which is to end terrorism, to oppose it and to ensure that it never succeeds; but I disagree with the means.

Let me make an analogy. I want Irish unity, and the IRA shares—or would claim to share—that objective, but I disagree absolutely and fundamentally with the means that the IRA espouses. I have made the point to the IRA—and I repeat it now—that the means often debases the objective. It damages, as the IRA has damaged, the whole concept of Irish republicanism in a way in which unionism could never damage it—in a way in which no British Government through the centuries could ever have damaged it. Singlehandedly, through its means, the IRA has diminished a legitimate political philosophy, and put it into the gutter.

I make that point because I believe that the validity of being able to separate means from ends is central to the debate, for two reasons. I am speaking personally now. The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) and I had to make a choice today: we could be at Castle buildings for the—I hope—temporary demise of the all-party talks, or we could be here debating the PTA. We knew that, whichever alternative we chose, or our party chose for us, would be depressing, and indeed this is depressing.

Let me tell the Government and the Secretary of State, however, that I must retain two things, as must the people I represent. One is faith in the political process—the belief that it can and will solve the problem. The other is my faith, and that of those I represent, in the integrity of the law and the system of justice. The system of justice in this country will outlast both the IRA and the PTA, but we must see that damage is not done to it while these events are taking place. I think that there is enough evidence in the courts, the prisons and elsewhere to reveal the potential for damage to the political process.

If I cannot retain faith in those two things, what have I left to believe in? That is why I will vote against the Act tonight. The only weapon at my disposal is my use of my vote. To attack the use of a vote on an issue as important as this is to go to the very heart of the political process. We should all remember that. There will always be differences of opinion in the House, among parties and even within them. That is the essence of politics. The only method, the only weapon, we have is the use of our votes, and I will use mine on this matter.

I spoke of the integrity of the system of justice. I have some broad points for the Home Secretary. One relates to Miss McAliskey, who is in prison in London. Respect for the dignity of the human being is at the heart of our system of justice. For a woman seven months pregnant to be strip-searched almost 60 times while on remand—not found guilty of anything—must be an affront to human dignity. I put it to him that respect for the dignity of the human being, especially for a woman who is carrying the precious gift of life in her body, should be the overriding factor in his consideration.

It was sad to see the Minister responsible for prisons on television in Northern Ireland showing not the slightest iota of compassion, respect for womanhood or respect for motherhood, given the position that the Minister takes on the issue. Those 90 seconds did untold damage, because respect for human dignity was forgotten.

Mr. Maginnis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because I know that his time is short. However, he cannot have it two ways. He cannot say, "Respect me for how I cast my vote," and then say that we have to apply different criteria when we judge the case of someone whose extradition has been requested by another country in connection with a serious crime that had nothing to do with respect for life.

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman misses my point. I am not asking for respect for me casting my vote. I care for only one respect: my self-respect. I am talking about respect for the dignity of a human being. That must be at the heart of the justice system of this country or of any other. I make a plea to the Home Secretary on that count to act, and act quickly, in this case.

Mr. McNamara: Does my hon. Friend agree that the mental torture that this woman is undergoing in not knowing whether she will able to have and hold her child after her confinement is a form of torture that only a pregnant woman in prison can suffer? Instead of endless committees, we must have a precise and direct statement that, after her confinement, the mother will keep the child.

Mr. Allason: She should have thought of that before she started bombing people.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North. His point stands on its own.

Mr. Livingstone: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I distinctly heard a Minister say, "She should have thought of that before she started bombing people." There has been a previous instance of a case having to be dropped because of statements by Ministers.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members should not comment on such cases. I heard nothing. Perhaps the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) will continue.

Mr. Mallon: I plead with the Home Secretary, on a purely humanitarian basis, to consider as a matter of urgency the transfer of prisoners back to Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland. I know how it is, from my privileged position, to get from County Armagh to, for example, Full Sutton prison. I know the difficulties and how long the journey takes.

Mr. Allason: Ten minutes.

Mr. Mallon: It is not 10 minutes: it is a whole day.

For prisoners to serve their time in the north of Ireland would not affect their sentences or the justice that is being done. It creates an humanitarian context within which they

can serve their sentences. After all, it is a basic tenet that a loss of freedom is what people are sentenced to when they are sentenced to prison. That is sufficient, without adding to it.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone referred to an incident in my constituency, the murders at Kingsmills. I will never forget going to those funerals, or the sound of my feet walking through the streets in Bessbrook, because it was not easy for a Catholic nationalist representative to attend. A couple of weeks ago, but 21 years later, I heard the same sound of my own footsteps in the dark of night in Bessbrook, the night that the young soldier Stephen Restorick was killed.

In those 21 years, those who are committed to the view that we can solve our problems by violence and punitive means have learnt nothing. Surely it is the business of the political process, of which all hon. Members are part, to consider the problem without being tied ideologically to an approach that has not been very successful.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) said that such an approach was an antibiotic that can be used repeatedly until the problem is solved. If only it were as easy as that. The system becomes immune to antibiotics; after a while, they have to be replaced. The time is right to replace the present approach to solving the problem. That does not mean making any concessions to the IRA, the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Ulster Defence Association or anyone else.

6.47 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay) *rose—*

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. A few moments ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) alleged that a Minister had said of Roisin McAliskey, "She should have thought of that before she started bombing people." I distinctly heard the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) making that comment. At the outset of his brief remarks, he should have either the courage to confirm that that is his view, or the grace to withdraw the allegation.

Madam Speaker: I heard no such comment. Perhaps the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) could make it clear whether he said that.

Mr. Allason: I certainly made that comment, Madam Speaker. If you want me to withdraw it, I am happy to be guided by you.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is withdrawing the comment. He should understand that he should not comment on such cases.

Mr. Allason: Terrorism is murderous extortion for political purposes. It is as old as danegeld. Danegeld tells us that, if we start giving in to terrorism, we will be left with it for a long time. Terrorism, as we understand it in Britain, dates back in modern times to the Leila Khaled case, when a British Overseas Airways Corporation aeroplane was held hostage. Unfortunately, the British Government gave in to the terrorists, and Leila Khaled was released to safeguard British lives. As a direct consequence of the willingness of our European partners to do deals with terrorists, we and the west in general have had to endure terrorism.

The only weapon against terrorism is absolute resolution. That resolution was shown during the hunger strikes and at the Iranian embassy seige. The people responsible for fighting terrorism in Britain have three objectives. First, they are anxious to prevent and deter people from fighting their turf wars on this territory. That does not necessarily include the Provisional IRA. The Algerians have been using the United Kingdom as a base, and Sikh separatists have certainly been doing the same. There was a Saudi bomb a short time ago. The most recent terrorist convictions were of two Palestinian bombers.

The second objective of the people to whom we give the responsibility of fighting terrorism is to prosecute and bring good convictions of terrorists. I refer my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to my earlier intervention about the possible use in criminal trials in the United Kingdom of intercept evidence. Customs and Excise, the National Criminal Intelligence Service, the police, the Security Service and the Secret Intelligence Service are now of the view that that would be a worthwhile weapon.

Of course one does not want to compromise the source, but, since the Interception of Communications Act 1986, most people have readily understood that particular weapon, which is a useful one. The people responsible for fighting terrorism are handicapped by not being able to use intercept evidence in court.

Thirdly, extradition is an essential part of the fight against terrorism. Fuller co-operation is required, not only from Britain—to make absolutely certain that Crown Prosecution Service papers are in order when they are served overseas—but from our European partners.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) made a characteristically dire speech, using the royal "we" throughout, although he was alone on the Liberal Democrat Benches. The proposition that he appeared to make, that false confessions were made as a consequence of prolonged detention, was nonsense. The Bridgewater case had nothing whatever to do with prolonged detention. In the Judith Ward case—the only one I can think of which involved a false confession—she volunteered the confession before she was taken into detention.

I suggest that the Houses should give one final message to the terrorist—that all hon. Members on both sides of the House went through the same Lobby tonight. That is a message that will be understood, particularly by people in the Clinton Administration, who got an unpleasant shock when the Canary Wharf bomb went off, and it became clear that the ceasefire period had been used by the Provisionals to regroup.

We must show resolution. That is the only thing that terrorists—whatever their origin, whatever their motives—understand. The House standing united this evening would send the best possible message to them.

6.53 pm

Ms Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): It would be best if the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) realised that he should say on his feet what he says from a sedentary position. I welcome his withdrawal of his earlier sedentary comment.

[Ms Marjorie Mowlam]

I am sure that the whole House identifies with the closing comments of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon)—that, whatever people's views on this issue, it is one of the basic democratic rights in the country and in the House that individuals have the right to vote as they choose. There was general agreement in the Chamber this evening with that view.

Since the IRA abandoned its 18-month ceasefire in February last year, people in Britain and Northern Ireland have once again been subjected to a sustained campaign of violence and intimidation. The bombing at Canary Wharf shattered a thousand hopes and dreams, here, in Northern Ireland and in the Republic, and took the lives of two men. The appalling and sickening catalogue of atrocities committed by the IRA has continued throughout the United Kingdom, as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) outlined so clearly.

The same point was emphasised by the right hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Needham), who, as he said, made his maiden speech in the House in the presence of fewer people than were present this evening. I read his maiden speech while other hon. Members were speaking this evening. It was rather humorous, and he used rather more words than his predecessors in his family used, five of whom have been Members of Parliament. Among many people I meet in Northern Ireland, there is a great deal of respect for the right hon. Gentleman and the work he did in Northern Ireland. I welcome the years of effort that he put in to try to bring peace and economic development to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Livingstone: While we condemn all acts of violence, does my hon. Friend agree that part of the problem that undermines the campaign against violence is the insensitive way in which the Government have used the powers they have? Literally thousands of people coming through our ports have been criminalised. They feel humiliated by the way in which they are treated. We have heard this evening the appalling account of the way in which Roisin McAliskey is being treated. She has been strip-searched 60 times in little more than six weeks.

Ms Mowlam: I hear what my hon. Friend says. He, I and my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) have written to the Home Secretary and to the Prison Service about Roisin McAliskey. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is a difficult issue, but I am informed that the necessary medical services are being provided. In considering whether she and her baby should be allowed to be together, the health of the mother and child should be paramount. I am assured that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), the shadow Home Secretary, agreed with me on that point.

Mr. Corbyn: Will my hon. Friend confirm that it is essential that Roisin McAliskey be told now exactly what the birth arrangements will be, who the birth partner can be, and where she will give birth?

Ms Mowlam: I am told that all the information on the birth partner is available, and has been printed in answer to parliamentary questions. I have answered sufficiently the first part of my hon. Friend's question.

My time has run out, so I shall make two or three points, and leave it to the Home Secretary to conclude the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn clearly outlined the two problems with the prevention of terrorism Act—exclusion, and detention for seven days without judicial review. I was pleased that the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), adopting his usual approach, tried to consider the arguments on either side, and reason through our position. I welcome his open-mindedness.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) wanted the broadcasting restrictions reinstated. That view is not shared by the Labour Front-Bench team, but an open discussion of the issue was most welcome.

The debate has moved on. We have explained why we believe that there are flaws in the legislation, as I did in the debate on the emergency provisions Act last year. We have reassured the House that we will not vote to leave the people of Britain and Northern Ireland without the protection of anti-terrorist legislation. We have reinforced that in the position that we have adopted this evening.

6.57 pm

Mr. Howard: With leave of the House, I should like to say a few words to pick up on the main themes that have emerged from the debate, and to respond in the short time I have to some of the points that have been made.

Of course we have heard a good deal about human rights and civil liberties. Of course it is true, and I do not deny it, that the prevention of terrorism Act contains some exceptional measures. It does so because those measures are needed to protect the safety of the citizens of this country. That is why the Act is on the statute book. That is why we believe that it should be renewed year after year, and that is why I attack those who are not prepared to come into the Lobby to support its renewal.

I am not suggesting that hon. Members are not entitled to register their votes in the House in whichever way they choose—whether it is the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) or anyone else. They must accept, however, that the implication of their act should be pointed out to the people of the country. If it is the considered view of the police, the Security Service and the independent reviewer that the Act's measures are needed to protect the citizens of this country, we must have those measures in force.

I should like to be able to refer to all of those who contributed to the debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Needham) gave us his swan song—his last political testament—in a distinguished speech. I should like to add my tribute to his work in Northern Ireland, and as Minister for Trade. His contribution to the country will be remembered long after he has left this place.

The Act has saved countless lives, yet the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition, has never voted for it, not once in his time in the House. What clearer example could there be of his total lack of judgment and his lack of understanding of the need of our people for strong protection from the bomber and the gunman? What clearer example could there be of his total unfitness to be Prime Minister of the country?

The Government have consistently shown that we can be trusted to carry out our duty to protect our people. On that basis, I commend the order to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 13.

Division No. 89] **[7 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Chidgey, David
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas–Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson–Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hampson, Dr. Keith
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett–Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox–Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Robert
McNair–Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangf'd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Twinn, Dr Ian

Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

NOES

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Canavan, Dennis
Corbyn, Jeremy
Dalyell, Tam
Etherington, Bill
Loyden, Eddie
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mallon, Seamus
Mullin, Chris
Rooney, Terry
Skinner, Dennis

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eddie McGrady and
Mr. John McAllion.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 18th February, be approved.

Mr. McNamara: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will recall that in the course of the last debate—I apologise for interrupting the one that will take place now—the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) made a comment for which he later apologised, in which he indicated that he felt that a prisoner at present in Holloway, Miss Roisin McAliskey, was guilty of the crime for which it is sought that she be extradited to Germany.

We have already had situations in the House under the British legal system where a similar type of statement was made when we were introducing the question of the reduction of the right to silence, and that resulted in the acquittal of prisoners by the Court of Appeal. We are now in the difficult position that, this statement having been made in the House, it will be read in the newspapers and may possibly affect the attitude of the magistrates in deciding whether that lady should be taken back to Germany or whether she should be granted bail. That is a very serious matter but, in addition, if she should be extradited to Germany, what will be the effect of a statement made in the House, withdrawn rather halfheartedly by the hon. Gentleman on your instruction, Madam Speaker? Will that prejudice her trial in Germany?

I believe that this matter is something about which you, Madam Speaker, might like to think and return to the House with a statement, because it is very serious.

Madam Speaker: As the House is aware, I did not hear the alleged comment made from a sedentary position, but I am of course aware that when the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) got to his feet to speak tonight, he did withdraw whatever comment he had made at that time. It seems to me to be the old issue of moderation in language in this House, which I caution all hon. Members to be careful about.

I take the point made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) seriously, but I do not wish to come back to the House about it; I think enough has been said. I hope that all hon. Members will take heed of what I say, particularly the hon. Member for Torbay, who knows very well that he should not have made those comments from a sedentary position. He withdrew them later, but it is too late then. There should be moderation in speech in this House, especially on the serious issues that we are debating this evening.

Mr. Maginnis: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Like you, I did not hear the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) make those comments, and they would not have appeared in *Hansard* or had any publicity if those who are most at folly in inviting members of the IRA into the House had not raised the issue in the way that they did. Am I not right in suggesting that it was quite improper for an hon. Member to raise such a sensitive matter in that manner when he could have gone to you privately and raised the issue?

Madam Speaker: We must now move on to the next debate on Northern Ireland.

Mr. Madden: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. As I was the Member who raised this matter with you a few minutes ago, may I now ask the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) to withdraw the allegation that I at any time have invited the IRA to this place or to any other place? May I, while I am on my feet, say that I visited Holloway yesterday and met Roisin McAliskey—

Madam Speaker: Order. This is not a point of order for me to deal with at all, and I am not going to have the debate which has just come to a close extended in this way. We now have a motion on Northern Ireland before us, and I call Sir John Wheeler to move it.

Mr. Madden: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Are you not going to request the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone to withdraw the allegation clearly made against me that I at any time have invited the IRA anywhere?

Madam Speaker: Order. I have been in the Chair since half-past 6, I have had a number of points of order and I am going to leave it at that and ask Sir John Wheeler to move the motion.

Northern Ireland Appropriation

7.17 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): I beg to move,

That the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

The draft order has two purposes. The first is to authorise expenditure of £122 million in the 1996–97 spring supplementary estimates. That will bring total estimates provision for Northern Ireland to departmental services to £6,560 million for this financial year. The second purpose is to authorise the vote on account of £2,941 million for 1997–98. That will enable the services of Northern Ireland Departments to continue until the 1997–98 main estimates are brought before the House later this year.

I remind the House that the draft order does not cover expenditure by the Northern Ireland Office on law and order and other services. Details of the sums sought are given in the estimates booklet and the statement of sums required on account, which, as usual, are available in the Vote Office.

I now turn to the estimates. Some of the votes seek token increases only because new pressures have been offset by savings elsewhere in the vote. To give hon. Members the maximum time, I shall refer only to the main areas where supplementary provision is sought.

In the Department of Agriculture's vote 1, which covers expenditure on national agriculture and fisheries support measures, a net increase of some £0.6 million is required. About £0.3 million is required for national back-up aid to EU fishing projects, £0.1 million is for the payment of grants for the decommissioning of nephrops fishing vessels, some £0.3 million is to fund additional commitments under the farm and conservation grants scheme, and £0.2 million is required to meet ex gratia compensation payments to sheep and suckler cow producers who were disadvantaged owing to a misinterpretation of EU quota regulations. These increases are partially offset by projected savings in other areas.

In the Department's vote 2, covering local support measures, a net increase of £6.3 million is sought. This includes £.3.7 million for payments made from the civil contingencies fund for the 24 to 30-months bull slaughter scheme and for increased expenditure to compensate for outbreaks of animal diseases of various kinds. An increase of some £1.4 million represents the carry forward of running cost underspends from 1995–96, while £1.1 million is for health and safety work. Increased expenditure in the vote is partially offset by a net increase in receipts of £0.9 million.

I now turn to the Department of Economic Development, where token increases of £1,000 are sought in all three votes. In vote 1, some £2.6 million is required by the Industrial Development Board for site acquisition, development and building works at Springvale in west Belfast. Two million pounds is sought to meet increased claims for marketing grant support and legal costs, while a further £2 million is required to meet contractual commitments in respect of aircraft sales financing and support for the shipbuilding industry. The increases are offset by increased receipts and reduced requirements elsewhere in the vote.

In vote 2, the main element is receipts from the sale of shares in Northern Ireland Electricity plc and the residual associated costs. These costs are being met out of the dividend payments and the proceeds from the sale of the shares.

Finally within vote 3, an increase of £0.7 million is sought for capital expenditure on training facilities. Offsetting savings have been declared elsewhere in the vote, reducing the requirement to a token £1,000.

Turning to the Office for the Regulation of Electricity and Gas, formerly the Office of Electricity Regulation for Northern Ireland, an increase of about £0.4 million is required. This increase is to cover expenditure by the director general of gas, a new statutory appointment, and is for consultancy costs incurred in the preparation of Ofreg's submission on NIE's price control to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

I turn next to the Department of the Environment, where a net increase of £5.1 million is sought in vote 1. The main requirement of some £8 million is for roads maintenance and capital, while some £3.1 million is for additional compensation payments to Northern Ireland Railways. These increases are partially offset by additional receipts of £4.8 million and a reduction of £2.5 million in capital grants to Northern Ireland Railways.

In vote 2, covering housing, an increase of £10.5 million is sought. Some £7 million is to provide assistance to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, while £3.5 million is to provide private sector housing renovation grants. Gross housing expenditure in Northern Ireland this year is now expected to be about £608 million, an increase of £5 million over 1995–96.

In vote 3, covering water and sewerage services, a net increase of some £2.5 million is sought. About £3.3 million is for operational and capital requirements. This is partially offset by additional receipts of £0.5 million, together with reduced privatisation costs of £0.2 million.

In vote 4, which covers environmental and other services, a net increase of £4.3 million is sought. Some £5 million is for regeneration-related matters, about £9 million represents the carry forward of running costs and underspends from 1995–96, and about £6 million is for capital works on accommodation. This increased expenditure is largely offset by additional receipts of £11.6 million and a reduction of £4 million in matching funding for the EU peace and reconciliation programme.

Turning to the Department of Education, a net increase of £5.8 million is sought in vote 1. This includes some £9.6 million for grants to education and library boards, mainly for maintenance, energy efficiency measures, rates revaluation, Irish-medium education, making good arson damage, the fitting of seat belts in school buses, and the cross-community contact scheme. Some £0.4 million is for integrated education, £1.3 million is for capital works at colleges of education, and £1.9 million is for student support. The increases are partially offset by savings elsewhere within the vote. Provision for further education incorporation is included in the estimates and in the vote on account for 1997–98.

In vote 2, an increase of some £5.5 million is sought for the teachers superannuation scheme.

I now turn to the Department of Health and Social Services, where a net increase of £50.6 million is sought in vote 1 for expenditure on hospital, community health,

[Sir John Wheeler]

personal social services, health and social services trusts, family health services and certain other services. This includes £14.7 million carried forward from 1995–96 under the end-year flexibility scheme, £3.5 million for hospital emergency admissions and haemophilia costs, £3 million for the family health service, and £20 million to enable trusts to repay trust debt remuneration, together with transfers to and from DHSS vote 3, so as to realign provision following a reappraisal of functions within the department under a senior management review.

In vote 3, a token increase of £1,000 is sought for certain miscellaneous health and personal social services costs to reflect the corresponding senior management review transfers to and from DHSS vote 1, £0.8 million carried forward from 1995–96, and an additional £2.6 million in respect of the EU peace and reconciliation programme.

In vote 4, a net increase of £8.3 million is sought. This includes £11.5 million for running cost, capital and other administration pressures in the Department. These increases are partially offset by reductions elsewhere within the vote.

In vote 5, which covers social security administered by the Social Security Agency, a token increase of £1,000 is sought. This is mainly to realign provision between the individual benefits and to take account of increased appropriations in aid in respect of recoveries from the Northern Ireland national insurance fund, which finances expenditure on the contribution element of jobseeker's allowance.

In vote 6, which covers social security centrally administered by the Department of Health and Social Services, £10 million is sought. This is mainly due to increased expenditure on rent rebates and rent allowances, together with increased payments into the Northern Ireland national insurance fund in respect of the Treasury grant. These increases are partially offset by decreases in the independent living fund, social fund and rates rebates.

Finally, in the Department of Finance and Personnel's vote 2, an additional net amount of some £8.8 million is sought to cover superannuation and other allowances.

In my opening remarks I have drawn attention to the main provisions of the order. In replying to the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for North–East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) will respond to the points raised by hon. Members. I commend the order to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): It might be helpful if I make it clear that the debate on the order may cover all matters for which Northern Ireland Departments, as distinct from the Northern Ireland Office, are responsible. Police and security are the principal subjects excluded.

7.29 pm

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My recollection is that, last year, Madam Speaker gave that direction before we started the debate. I notice that the Minister departed only by omitting that from the text that he used to open the debate. That is a roundabout way of saying that the technicalities of the order follow a prescribed pattern.

I am sure that almost all hon. Members present caught some of what the Minister said, but we hope to tease out what the order means in terms of its practical effect on Northern Ireland. The debate is principally an opportunity for Northern Ireland Members to raise with the Minister and his colleagues matters that relate to the lives of their constituents, so I shall keep my remarks comparatively brief.

The background to the order was, in part, the public expenditure document released by the Secretary of State on 10 December; the appropriation applies to part of the sums therein.

Can the Minister tell us why public expenditure announcements for Northern Ireland must always go through the farce of a private notice question? Why cannot they just be published, instead of the pretence that, on this occasion, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) is particularly interested in them, or that, the previous year, the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) was? Their enthusiasm is not in evidence now.

The Minister mentioned the European Union peace and reconciliation programme funding. Can his colleague confirm that that is in addition to Government provision, and will not be used to replace it?

The Government have, regrettably—I am sure that they regret it as much as anyone else—had to transfer £120 million to the security budget, as the Secretary of State made clear. I recognise your injunction, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not to stray into matters of law and order. I do not question the need for the security services to receive all the support that they have a right to expect, but given that all the mainstream public services are under such pressure, can the Minister assure us that, consistent with the need to protect the security of our citizens, the security services are tested as rigorously as other services to ensure that public money is being spent to best effect and is not being wasted?

If matters turn out more optimistically than the Government have suggested in their projections for the next three years, what mechanisms are in place for returning money to the mainstream budgets? Can the Minister confirm that no spending commitments have been made to fund spending in the current year from the 1997-98 provision or from provision for subsequent years?

The Northern Ireland Audit Office revealed last year that £14 million had been spent on consultants of all kinds. Given the explosion of agentisation—that is the expression that the Department uses—that has taken place in Northern Ireland Departments over the past 12 months, what is the latest figure?

I shall deal with the Departments in the order in which they appear in the document, starting with the Department of Agriculture. The Minister mentioned the slaughter programme, which most people call the accelerated cull. Can he confirm that that has started? He referred to suckler cows. Does the figure include the provision that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster outlined at the Dispatch Box on 17 February?

The BSE crisis has been deemed a national issue and most of the funds to support the programme have been found from elsewhere. I say that with great respect for the Minister. Why, then, is the fight against the only

systematic and prevalent terrorist campaign that exists in these islands not considered a national issue? Why must other budgets be used to combat terrorism?

Last week, the chairman of the Institute of Directors in Northern Ireland addressed the annual meeting in Belfast. I quote from a newspaper report:

"Mr. Alan McClure told 400 business leaders and senior civil servants at the IOD's annual banquet at the Culloden Hotel, Belfast, last night, that such cuts sent 'the wrong message to the wrong people'.

He complained that underfunding was creating the worst crisis in two decades in the North's education system. Moreover, recent reductions in research and development grants to Queen's University and the University of Ulster 'threatened inward investment and the competitiveness of Northern Ireland companies'.

'Cutting education and training budgets, almost by definition, hits those at the bottom of the educational totem pole. But it does something else. It reinforces a sense of isolation, of failure and lack of self-worth,' he said.

'It confirms to many youngsters that the paramilitaries may offer more than they can'."

If that was not damaging enough, Mr. McClure went on to speak about the Government's attitude to economic and monetary union, but I shall not burden the Minister with that.

The order is bad news for the Department of Economic Development. There are to be cuts of £73 million from the training budget, with the action for community employment—ACE—programme again suffering. One almost has a sense of déjà vu. This time last year, the ACE programme was facing cuts of 25 per cent. and 2,000 job losses. I do not understand what the Government have against the programme. This year there is the justification that money is being transferred for other purposes. Last year the Government did not have that justification, but they still imposed harsh cuts.

Although the public expenditure document refers to substantial resources for training, those references are disingenuous, as they mask substantial cuts. There is considerable concern and anger at the decision to close the Dundonald training centre, which will leave a large part of the East Belfast, Castlereagh, North Down and Ards area with no specialised training for the long-term unemployed in particular. Will Ministers ask officials in the Training and Employment Agency to review the proposed closure in the light of all the representations that have been made locally, especially as no consultation was undertaken before the decision was announced?

The community work programme, which has been used in part to supplement the losses of the ACE programme, is not seen as an adequate replacement. We shall be interested to see the two-year review that is due in the near future. That will confirm most people's reservations. Increases to the Industrial Development Board budget, welcome though they are, will be wasted if they are more than offset by the fact that the skilled workers needed to foster investment and growth in Northern Ireland are not available because of cuts further down the training chain.

On the environment, the regional rate needs to be set about now, if it has not been done already. When might that be done? In the light of the re-rating of commercial properties that has just been undertaken, will the Minister give us details of the transitional grant assistance for that? From which budget will it be drawn?

The Minister mentioned increased subsidies, or increased assistance, to Northern Ireland Railways. Will he make it clear whether that includes the shortfall that has been identified in the upgrading of the link between Belfast and Dublin, or whether that will come from a separate source?

Housing has also taken a firm hit in the order, particularly at a time of growing waiting lists and growing homelessness. I know that the Minister resisted that view in Northern Ireland questions a couple of months ago, but those are the facts. What is the Secretary of State implying when he says in the public expenditure statement:

"I see significant opportunities in the future however for the private sector to increase its role in meeting the Province's house building needs especially through Housing Associations in the context of the recent Housing Review"?

The Minister has referred to the housing review, but what will that actually translate into and how might that go at least some way to offsetting the sharp reduction in public investment that the order portends?

There is, I suppose, a little good news in education provision, at least for the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), who is not in his place at the moment, because I distinctly remember him making an impassioned plea on behalf of Belmont primary school last year. I notice that that has gone into the capital programme, so that is to be welcomed, but in his statement the Secretary of State mentions that the plans to advance nursery vouchers will not now be proceeded with. I have a letter from the Minister of State, who was kind enough to write to me after this debate last year, in which he set out the Government's plans to proceed with nursery vouchers this year. He wrote:

"The implementation of the Scheme in Northern Ireland will require a certain amount of tailoring to take account of the distinctive features of the education system here. Officials in my Department have been working on proposals and I hope soon, in line with my previous public commitment, to launch a document for consultation which will set out how the Scheme might relate to Northern Ireland."

Given the fact that the scheme is not now to be introduced, will the Minister give some indication of how much time and effort was wasted on that particular extravagance?

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, when the pre-school lobby was in Parliament last week, those who were there representing Northern Ireland were pressing for the voucher scheme to be extended to Northern Ireland?

Mr. Dowd: I accept that entirely. It merely underlines my point that there are mixed views on the scheme's value. I too have heard people from all parts of Northern Ireland saying that they would welcome the voucher system, but the fact that people's expectations have been built up, only to be dashed, shows the Government's conduct in this matter. Whichever way we look at it, the Government have clearly wasted their time and money pursuing their policy, and disappointed people as a result.

The proposed education spending implies some increase, but that implication is not what is happening on the ground, certainly in relation to the school meals service, the school transport service, curriculum advisory support, the library service, the youth service and discretionary awards. On all of those, boards are making considerable cuts.

[Mr. Dowd]

Even the objective of protecting the schools budget is not what it might seem. I have a copy of a letter from the South Eastern education and library board to the chairman of all the schools in its area. I think it would be instructive if I read just a couple of paragraphs to the House.

"Dear Chairman

As you are aware the Board has encountered great difficulty in meeting its financial commitments in the 1996–97 financial year, and it is indebted to Governors and Schools for the efforts which they are making to keep expenditure to a minimum. The Department of Education has made available additional resources on a loan basis in the 1996–97 financial year, with repayment required in the 1997–98 and in 1998–99 financial years.

The implications for your school are reflected in the revised projected position at 31 March 1997 and the projected position at 31 March 1998. You will also be aware that because of the tight financial constraints which all schools and services are experiencing, the Board has very limited flexibility which would allow schools to carry deficits at the end of the financial year."

The letter goes on to give details of the local management of schools formula budget for 1997–98 and then in two chunks takes 10 per cent. of it away for the repayment of loans. Will the Minister explain why not just the capital, but the revenue, budget seems to be run on borrowed money? How many further examples are there of commitments made this year, particularly in the health sector, where various loans have been forthcoming, and what will the impact of those repayments be further down the track?

On health, we had an excellent debate this morning, for which we are grateful to the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs)—who is not here at the moment. I shall not repeat much of what we went through then, other than to say that the Government's reforms and the internal market in the national health service continue to absorb into administration money that would be far better spent on patient care. The public expenditure document mentions, yet again, the state of the prescribed drugs budgets and the efforts to try to reduce them—but that is now an almost permanent feature of expenditure documents. Will the Minister give some indication of what progress is being made to reduce the prescribing budgets, particularly as, in the Eastern board in particular, general practitioners have put forward various schemes which I believe he has accepted at least in part to try to control that expenditure?

The Secretary of State concludes the public expenditure document by saying:

"Northern Ireland has to regain the path that leads towards lasting peace, stability and growth".

We echo that without reservation, not simply for the effect that it would have on public spending—even though the Government's attitude towards that seems to be somewhat selective—but because it would be of unremitting benefit to every citizen in Northern Ireland.

7.47 pm

Sir James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I begin, alphabetically, with the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland. I have seized on one little phrase: "certain alternative land uses". Right hon. and hon. Members will recall that it gained currency as part of the Jopling reforms mark one, when the then Minister returned from Brussels with a directive from our betters in the superior Parliament exhorting farmers to stop producing beef, milk, cereals or anything else and, whatever the cost, find another use for their land—but not produce anything if they could help it. For some reason, fortunately, that never caught on in Northern Ireland, perhaps because a different planning theology has taken root over there and it was never really enforced.

If people had a look around Northern Ireland, they would find land for which an alternative use could be found. I think of Ministry of Defence property and disused airfields. The Minister of State will know that there is some land at Maghaberry prison on which I have my eye, not for personal property, but for the worthy cause of providing recreation facilities in that rapidly growing village.

Vote 2 mentions scientific and veterinary services. After the BSE scare—I use the word scare deliberately—we owe much to the veterinary services in Northern Ireland for placing Northern Ireland beef at the head of the queue waiting for the ban to be lifted. Our case rests not on geographical or political considerations but on the uniquely high standard of animal health in Northern Ireland and on our ability to trace every animal.

I say with very great regret that I trust that there is no foundation to reports that some ill-disposed people in the Scottish Office are grubbing around to see if they can find what they call a chink in Northern Ireland's armour, which presumably would enable them to sabotage the case for Ulster beef. I will not go more deeply into that subject now, but I know that our veterinary services will continue to serve Northern Ireland's agricultural activities and their customers.

I have no doubt that the news industry is becoming bored with BSE, or that it will come up with a new scare before the general election. I have been proved wrong in my forecast that lettuce leaves would be the next victim of a scare, as it appears that spring water from our own garden wells will be the next scare—and yet another example of poisoning someone's well. I merely give warning to be prepared for it, but be of good cheer, because—like all the other scares, fashions and gimmicks of the news industry—it will die a death in time, if people do not resuscitate it.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Department got it wrong, once again, on the veterinary laboratory at Omagh? It eventually had to reverse its very foolish decision. Does that not prove the great value that the veterinary service provides in detecting animal problems in Northern Ireland? Does it not also prove that the man from the Ministry very often gets it wrong?

Sir James Molyneaux: Yes, that example is adequate testimonial to the efficiency of all who served in that centre and in other such establishments in Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend was far too modest to claim that the reversal of that decision was in some ways a tribute to all the genuine political parties in Northern Ireland which came together, not for the first time, to make their presence felt. Their advice was taken by those in authority. I have a sneaking suspicion that the Minister of State and the Under-Secretary did not entirely disagree with the advice that we were giving—although I will not embarrass them by asking them to confirm or deny that.

I suppose that the situation with the purity of water puts us on a par with sunny Spain, which deplores the quality of drinking water in the European Community. It claims

that water in Europe is not drinkable and that much needs to be done to restore it, so that it can be safely drunk and all the rest of it, but the Spanish forget that, on disembarking from an aircraft anywhere in Spanish territory, one is warned within an inch of one's life to drink nothing but bottled water, which is imported from France. A wee bit of educational activity is needed there, even if it does offend our Spanish colleagues in the great European Union, as we now call it.

The second Department listed in the schedule is the Department of Economic Development. I am not one of those whose standard practice is to withhold credit from the Government and from Departments when credit is due, so I have no hesitation in saying that this month's report from the PA Consulting Group projects 3 per cent. growth in employment in the next 12 months. That growth comes on top of steady job increases over the past two years. I do not believe that all of that could have been achieved had it not been for the drive, energy and determination of Lady Denton, who—despite the extreme pressure of coping with her other Department, the Department of Agriculture, in the crisis year of BSE—has projected Ulster industry on to the world map. I trust that we can all resolve to support her in any further initiatives in that regard.

Vote 2 mentions energy efficiency, which reminds me that we all have a role to play in promoting that theme, particularly in the construction industry. I could never comprehend why we should continue to indulge ourselves by building buildings with glass walls, which surely must cost a fortune to heat in winter and cool in summer. I have yet to find an architect who can explain the reasoning behind building such structures. Right hon. and hon. Members have wide scope to make some progress in the matter by persuading the Treasury to reduce the 17.5 per cent. VAT rate on conservation materials, or by persuading the Treasury at least to reduce it to the 8 per cent. rate that applies to heating fuel.

On vote 3, if money should become available or savings made in the Department of Economic Development, I hope that the action for community employment scheme and other training schemes will benefit and be reinstated. In my humble opinion, savings could be made through greater co-operation by the planning authorities. Protection of the environment is a noble objective—fair enough—but not if it is achieved at the expense of delaying applications from industry or if it causes wasteful expenditure on electricity links which subsequently increase the cost of electricity.

The Under-Secretary is doing a good job in the Department of the Environment, but there is great disappointment because the Belfast-Larne road scheme has slipped back further in the schedule. It is the most important road link and it is the link to Europe—as the European Union realises. Surely a special case can be made in asking Brussels to give back at least some of our own money, to which we are entitled, as Europe has declared a particular interest in that project. A case could be made for new roads and new bypasses elsewhere, but we must get it clear in our minds that Larne is the one external link and the one external route to which all the others must take second place in the queue. I say that as a representative of Lisburn.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) mentioned the expenditure under votes 2 and 3 on housing, water and related services. I am afraid that that £11 million has not been wisely or sensibly spent. The Environment Minister knows that I pleaded for a commonsense approach to housing in, for example, the village of Glenavy. We failed to halt the fivefold expansion in new build in that village, which occurred years before provision of the services listed in votes 2 and 3—sewerage, water, electricity and schools.

It would be indelicate to describe the appalling risk posed to public health during the past two summers because the advice offered by the Minister and me was ignored and almost treated with derision. People said, "It can't happen; it won't happen. The services will all be in place before the houses are built," but they were wrong—those services are still not in place. I ask for a little more co-ordination between the authorities and rather less arrogance in such cases.

Most of us have had a fair bit of advice in recent days about what must be done in education. Most of that advice centres on increased expenditure. Many of us would like that, but the reality is that it will not happen. We may have to settle for a revamp and a re-examination of each education board's expenditure projects. As I understand it, nearly all of them are in deficit, so they would be unlikely to splash new money around even if they got it.

There is a case for taking another look at the bodies that are not really at the core of education. Those auxiliary bodies are no doubt very worthy, but there are 19 of them. They are not teachers and do not claim to be. Teachers are the vital element in education. Teachers and the environment in which they work—the schools—must have priority over all the other well-meaning bodies. I am not suggesting that those other bodies should be set aside, simply that they should consider the possibility of finding other sources of funding.

It is astonishing how many self-appointed bodies are sloshing around in money from all manner of sources. I fear that there will be a day of reckoning eventually but, for the moment, a bit of co-ordination would be helpful for those 19 bodies in what the Minister referred to recently as the protected funding group—those with ring-fenced funding. Surely they should have some share, or at least set about endeavouring to obtain some share, of the money that comes from sources other than the Treasury. If that cannot be achieved, we shall have to admit that the boards will be driven to the painful choice of cutting some of services that are not quite in the group of 19, but are neither compulsory nor statutory. Many of them could be made self-financing. Tough decisions must be made, because a general election will change nothing.

Department of Health and Social Services vote 1 contains a staggering sum. The only certainty is that demand will grow remorselessly. This morning, my hon. Friends dealt fully with the subjects of votes 1 to 6. The first is of special interest to me, given my involvement in that area in my earlier years, until my second demobilisation in 1973, which was caused by reforms brought in by a Stormont Government. My first demobilisation was in 1946, when the Royal Air Force decided that it might be able to manage without me. I am now within I do not know how many days of my third and final demobilisation.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Temporarily.

Sir James Molyneaux: I do not believe in reincarnation.

[Sir James Molyneaux]

Vote 1 deals with community health and personal and social services. On the basis of my experience, I believe that the best of the trusts have transformed the service to patients to an incredible extent. I pay that general tribute to the trusts, and specifically to the handful of the best of them. Others have not quite measured up to their standard.

That implies competition. Will the Minister confirm that the non-recurrent funding made available to the Belfast hospitals outside the contracting process will cease on 31 March 1997? What actions have been taken to reshape the hospitals so that I can reassure my constituents that any potential penalty for them will cease? In his review of the capitation allocation, will the Minister take account of the fact that the population of our Eastern board area is expanding so rapidly that even a period of 12 months can render any calculations inaccurate?

In case this should be my last speech in the House, I should like to finish with a word of caution. For the foreseeable future, there will be no crock at the end of the rainbow.

8.4 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): There are many matters of great concern to the people of Northern Ireland at the moment. One of the greatest is the swingeing cut in education funding. There is no doubt that teachers, parents, children and those employed in education in the Province are gravely concerned about what will happen in our schools.

Hon. Members present will be aware that in his public statement on 10 December, the Secretary of State announced that the savings in the law and order budget released as a result of the cessation of violence would have to be restored in view of the IRA's abandonment of its ceasefire. There will be a tremendous cut in the education budget.

I should like the Minister to explain that cut to us. I understand that when security is being discussed at Budget time, an amount is allocated for the whole United Kingdom. There is a feeling in Northern Ireland that the Treasury and the Ministers have had two bites at the cherry. We do not see any cut in education in Manchester or the Canary Wharf area of this city, but we see it in Northern Ireland. Of all the people who might suffer, surely it should not be the children in their education prospects and their need for education and training. That goes to the heart of the people of Northern Ireland.

The implication is that there will be an additional £77 million over the next three years for the police authority and an additional £42 million for the Compensation Agency, making a total of £119 million—an increase of £36 million to the police authority over the previous year. The cuts will affect education seriously. Many hon. Members from Northern Ireland will have particular interests to put to the House. I am interested in the south-eastern area.

I have a note from the Northern Ireland Teachers Council that the number of teacher redundancies—not full retirements—will be more than 200. Taking more than 200 teachers out of the schools in that area will leave a gap in the ability of the schools to manage the education of the children under their care. The number of ancillary redundancies is not fully determined, but it will be 50 plus. It is estimated that there will be 10 headquarters redundancies, but the figure has not yet been finalised. When the figures are adjusted for inflation, expenditure on meals will be cut by 8.4 per cent., spending on colleges and secondary schools by 14.51 per cent., libraries by 15.3 per cent., youth services by 7.62 per cent., and discretionary awards by 14.25 per cent. They are large and serious cuts that will have an enormous effect upon children's schooling in Northern Ireland.

My two parliamentary colleagues and I met the Minister yesterday. He said that he could not tell us what the full impact of the cuts would be. We asked how many teachers would lose their positions—the teachers' unions estimate that as many as 500 might be affected—but the Minister could not provide an answer. There will be a serious crisis. As the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) said, an unusual thing happened at the annual meeting of the directors' board, when its chairman made a long speech about the cuts and the effect that they would have.

The overall allocation for education, arts and libraries in the next three years will be £1,376 million in 1997–98, £1,380 million in 1998–99, and £1,400 million in 1999–2000. Those allocations reflect adversely on education provision to the millennium as they represent funding increases of approximately 0.3 per cent. and 1.5 per cent. in the next two years. That is much less than the current and anticipated rates of inflation over the next three years. Therefore, we shall gain nothing from the alleged increases.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The hon. Gentleman referred to teacher redundancies. Did he notice that £50 million has been allocated to cover redundancies? Whatever the figure may be, it is a waste of money to make good teachers redundant and lose their skills.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The House and the Government must realise the seriousness of the situation, which is causing grave concern. According to the Department of Education, the Government's financial allocation to education in 1997–98 is 2 per cent. higher than that for 1996–97, which represents an increase of about £30 million in monetary terms.

The Department of Education must get to grips with the likely impact of the cuts. In all fairness to the Minister, he admitted that the cuts were serious and he recognised that schools would face financial hardship. However, I do not think that the Government have fully recognised that the reductions will create difficulties that cannot be solved. Children will suffer now and for the rest of their lives because they will not be educated adequately. That problem will not be solved in five or six years, and it concerns everyone in Northern Ireland.

The extent of the cuts imposed by Government was clearly illustrated on 25 February when the Education Minister announced a new capital building programme for schools throughout Northern Ireland. Opposition Front Benchers spoke about Dundonald and my colleague's delight at what had happened there. However, the overall figure is not encouraging. Schools throughout Northern Ireland will receive £23 million, which is in sharp contrast

to the trend of the past two years when capital programmes totalling £111 million were announced. If one compares those figures, one will see exactly what is happening.

All Northern Ireland Members complain that schools in their areas have Portakabin classrooms, some of which are not watertight. In many schools, the toilet facilities are outside the cabins so the children must walk from one Portakabin to another in adverse weather conditions. Yet capital expenditure has been cut.

I regret the fact that the Minister initially refused to meet with the Northern Ireland Teachers Council. I do not think that Ministers should adopt that attitude with anyone. He argued that he wanted to meet the politicians first, but he did not tell that to the council. He should have explained that he wanted to meet the elected representatives first. I am glad that a meeting is planned for next week, but the Minister's actions caused bitterness among those people who have a legitimate grievance. Parents want to see something done about this problem.

The Government are abdicating their responsibility in this area. The Government are responsible for providing free education for all pupils of statutory school age, but they will not be able to achieve that aim in Northern Ireland. Some £120 million in public sector funding will be diverted to the security budget over the next three years. Many people believe that that is immoral, obscene and reprehensible; they believe that the Government are making the children of Northern Ireland the scapegoats for a security problem for which they are not responsible and which they did not create.

I know that I must tread carefully, but that is what the Government have said. They claim that the cuts are caused by the security situation. That situation is commonly known as Drumcree, but it should be known as Garvaghy road, because that is where the trouble was. Last night, Gerry Adams told us that the IRA had been scheming and planning its actions for three years. The events were not caused by Orangemen wanting to walk home from church or wanting to go to their place of worship at Dunloy in my constituency, at Bellaghy in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea), or elsewhere in the constituency of the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross). It was a planned, concerted and orchestrated action on the part of the IRA.

I know that I am very much on the borders of the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I prefer union to borders. I want to retain union with the United Kingdom, but I support borders between us and the Irish Republic.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Is it not a fact that a fair proportion of the education budget has gone to funding the Gaelic Athletic Association halls where Sinn Fein concocted many of its plans over the past three years?

Rev. Ian Paisley: That is absolutely right. However, I shall not transgress any further as I must make some progress.

I think that the House should consider seriously what is happening in our Province. As I said at the talks today, I would like the people who pointed the finger in the summer at the Orangemen and the Protestant population to withdraw their statement and to put the blame where it is rightly deserved.

I trust that the Minister will tell us how he will handle the situation, given the loss of 500 of the best teachers. How big will classes be, if 500 teachers are to be taken out of the education system? I am concerned that smaller classes will not be retained. There will also be a reduction in the number of temporary teachers to cover teachers who are absent on sick leave. What will happen when teachers get sick? Will there be no replacement, and will two classes have to be put together? We are told that there is no money, so what can we do?

I trust that the Government will reconsider this matter. Those cuts will lower the morale of teachers in schools, will lower the morale of pupils who attend schools and will lower the morale of parents who send their children to those schools. I must place on record the profound abhorrence in Northern Ireland about the position in our schools. Many experienced teachers will opt for premature retirement or redundancy to save the job of a young colleague. Those people have given their lives to teaching, but they cannot finish at a pensionable age because they want their younger colleagues at least to have the opportunity to earn money to sustain themselves.

The Government must realise that the position is very serious, and they must do something about it. The Northern Ireland Teachers Council has said in blunt, unequivocal terms that

"education is facing a crisis in Northern Ireland of such proportions that has never been witnessed before".

Its only hope is that the House of Commons will be able to pressurise the Government, so that they take this properly on board and do not just dismiss it and say, "We are very sorry, but this is the way it is going to be." I expect something from the Minister, and so do the people of Northern Ireland. The children have a right to expect a response. It is our right, and I trust that we will not be fobbed off by the Minister, and that he will give us a full statement.

I am deeply concerned about the roads programme. I agree wholeheartedly with the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) about the serious situation at Larne. I was at a meeting some years ago and was amazed to learn that Larne harbour was not marked on main European maps, yet at that time it was one of the largest ports in the United Kingdom. That has been put on the long finger. It took the Prime Minister to come to the centre of my constituency before the dualling of the A26 commenced. It took us 16 years to get that started. It has now started, but in the middle of it we were told that stage 3 has been put off. It may be six, seven or eight years before that work recommences. On the one hand we got encouragement, and with the next we got a smack in the teeth.

Hon. Members should look at the schedule of schemes deferred from the programme that was announced in February 1966. It lists schemes at Omagh, Antrim-Ballymena, Limavady, Limavady, Limavady, Limavady, Strand road, Windyhall, Comber, Garvaghy, Northway Portadown, Leckpatrick and the Toome bypass. They were all promised, were all on the list and were all postponed. That is a very serious matter indeed.

I received a letter from the chancellor of Queen's university, and from the chancellor of the university of Ulster. Both of them are frightfully concerned about

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

research budget cuts. That is a serious problem for our industry, because those universities make a valuable contribution to the present and future development of industry in the Province. The chancellor of Queen's university refers to

"the serious damage which will be done to Northern Ireland universities, and to the economy and Province generally, resulting from the 1996 Public Expenditure plans announced by the Secretary of State in December 1996. In his announcement he indicated that research funding for the two Northern Ireland universities is to suffer swingeing cuts of £4m (16 per cent.) from April 1997, increasing to £6m (24 per cent.) per annum from 1998. By contrast, the University system in England and Wales received additional funds."

Why was that? Why is there discrimination against the two universities in Northern Ireland?

The chancellor goes on to say that

"research is essential to wealth creation

research is essential to high quality teaching in our universities;

research expenditure benefits the economy in a wide variety of ways, including the creation of jobs and provision of well-trained graduates for the work force;

research facilities and personnel provide support advice for local companies, organisations and professions;

research expertise and graduate availability helps to attract high technology inward investment;

research helps to promote economic growth;

research helps the voluntary sector;

research gives rise to spin-off companies"—

and he lists them—

"research helps to improve health and health care;

research helps the professions and public bodies; and

research helps to improve the environment."

All those vital contributions that flow from research in our universities will be subject to swingeing cuts.

The Minister says that we need inward investment. The first question that companies coming to Northern Ireland ask is what research facilities are available in the universities. We have to tell them that we are sorry, but we cannot help.

I have been asked to raise the issue of Banbridge hospital. I lend my support to the hon. Members who represent the Armagh area that includes Banbridge. I give my backing to the demands of the action group. The closure of Banbridge hospital is a running sore. I do not understand why the Prime Minister, when approached by an across-the-board deputation of Members from Northern Ireland, said that he could not see his way to talking to them. I understand that there is to be an all-party deputation, which will include hon. Members from all parties in the House. I hope that what was not given to the Northern Ireland Members of Parliament will be given to those hon. Members representing both sides of the House who want to discuss this issue, because that would be good.

I must give some thanks to the Department. Like the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley, I am always prepared to say thank you for what we get. I am glad that the flood wall scheme has been carried out at the Toome road in my constituency. We have had a problem there for the past 30 or 40 years and I am glad that the scheme is now almost complete. The people in that area can go to their beds at night knowing that no matter the weather, they will not be flooded. I do not know how many times during my 27 years as the Member of Parliament for that area, I have had to rescue furniture as it floated round the homes of my constituents. That has happened over and over again. I must put on record my gratitude for the fact that the money has been found to resolve a problem that has brought fear into the hearts of people during adverse weather conditions in the winter.

8.31 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): At the start of the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you warned us not to transgress into the funding for law and order and the Northern Ireland Office. It is ironic that it is the transfer of funds from the budgets of other Departments that is the cause of some of the most serious complaints by Northern Ireland Members about the real cuts being made, particularly in education and health.

On behalf of those we represent, we all regret that the cost of the collapse of the ceasefire, the Orange demonstrations and the blockage of the roads throughout Northern Ireland in the first week of July last year, which cost £17 million alone, is part of the £120 million being transferred out of what I might call the personal services for every man, woman and child in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) has dealt well and in great detail with the problem affecting education provision for our children. I make no excuse for re-emphasising what he said, and confirming that the best estimate available to us is that 400 to 500 teachers will be made redundant. In a community of 1.5 million people, that will have a serious impact on the education of our children.

We all know that education cannot be switched on and off, or be provided one year and not the next. Our children and students are entitled to the same treatment, facilities and opportunities as those anywhere else in the United Kingdom. The cuts that have been imposed will, in my opinion and in the opinion of the best educationists in Northern Ireland, dictate that we will not have those facilities for our children and teachers.

The hon. Member for North Antrim, whom I shall quote considerably, has already said that the mature and experienced teachers are taking early redundancies and sacrificing the remnants of their professional career, on behalf of the younger members of the teaching fraternity. We are losing the best and most experienced teachers for the sake of the younger teachers with families. That is a great tragedy.

The pupil-teacher ratio will be affected dramatically, and that will be detrimental to the quality of teaching. If the number of pupils per teacher increases, the physical size of the classrooms, particularly in rural communities, will be inadequate. I represent a rural constituency, and I have already experienced that problem in my area. It will be impossible to provide an education.

I had a meeting last week, before the debate was scheduled, with about 25 principal teachers, from primary to tertiary and across the maintained, voluntary and state sectors. They were unanimously of the opinion that, with the existing deficiencies in their budgets together with the forecast increased deficiencies, they will not be able to deliver the national curriculum.

I do not know who does the sums in the Department of Education, but I should have thought that any prudent financier would have looked at the objective and then

considered how to provide the sums necessary to achieve it. Presumably the minimum objective is the delivery of the national curriculum, and the sums should have been calculated to achieve that. It seems as if someone just said, "We need *x* million from here," without considering the consequences for the children.

I have no doubt that many of the small rural schools dotted around my constituency will be forced to close. As a general rule, one thing that those schools have and others do not necessarily have is high academic achievement. The figures show that. The cuts will lead to the further degradation of the rural population and the ensuing problems of rebuilding and relocating all the facilities in some town or city.

I hope that the Minister will convey to his colleagues the serious nature of the problem. If he does not appreciate it yet, I hope that he will do the necessary research to find out whether what is said by Northern Ireland Members is true or false. I am sure that he will find that it is true.

I was caught badly by the fact that the cuts in education will mean an end to the summer schemes for the less privileged or less able in our society. That includes schemes such as those run by Mencap. Such schemes provide recreational facilities for the mentally and physically disabled, but they have been cut out completely this year. What sort of society can fail to deliver such a small thing as that?

Another major area that has been cut and which will affect the ordinary man, woman and child is health. The Under–Secretary of State who is to reply to the debate has departmental responsibility for that. I am convinced from all the evidence given to me that, if we have a 3 per cent. cut upon a 3 per cent. cut, together with the recovery of the deficits that already exist on a very low budget, there is a great danger that the health service, or sectors of it, will collapse completely.

In reality, care in the community is a farce at the moment, because the funding is not there. The great promises that were made when people were taken out of institutions and left in the community, and the promised back-up to give those people a meaningful and easier life, were all for naught. When I heard from a constituent how many hours of care are provided in London, I could not believe the contrast with the amount provided by the Southern health board in my constituency. It is unbelievable that people get 38 hours' community care in London, but in my constituency people with the same disabilities get half an hour a day. What has gone wrong? I hope that the Minister will address that issue in his reply.

I know that the cuts will lead to increased waiting times, because that happened in January 1986 and 1987 when the Royal Victoria hospital in Belfast cut non-elective surgery to nil. The fundholders could afford to pay for that surgery, which illustrated the double tier. The people on the waiting lists who will suffer most are those with cardiac problems and those with cancer. I do not have to spell out why they are the very members of society who cannot afford to wait. The Minister should take that point on board.

Why are the consequences of terrorism visited on the 98 per cent. of people in Northern Ireland who have no time for it and who suffer most from it? Why are children and ill people paying the price? The cost of the prevention of terrorism and other security measures should be a national burden, and contributions should be made from the national coffers, rather than by the communities that suffer the double jeopardy of violence and the bomb, and the cuts in their education and health care.

That approach is immoral in any Christian society. The victims are penalised for the crimes they abhor. There is no logic or morality in that. I ask Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office to tell the Treasury that we should be given the funding to deal with terrorism and other acts of lawlessness, to allow our people to enjoy the modicum of education and health care to which they are entitled.

I shall deal briefly with one or two agricultural issues. We have often debated the problem of BSE, and I do not want to repeat the well-argued case. I will leave that issue aside, but I hope that the submission made to Brussels last Tuesday will have an urgent and speedy passage through the committees there, to give some relief to the beef industry in Northern Ireland.

I draw the Minister's attention to the plight of the potato industry, which I have mentioned in the House before. The potato farmer is the poor relation of the agricultural scene. He does not receive benefits, subsidies, grants or deficiency payments. The potato farmer gets nothing—even though the market has collapsed this year—and he is just as much part of the agricultural scene as the dairyman, the beef farmer, the pig rearer and the cereal grower. But he is the only one who gets nothing.

Northern Ireland potato growers used to be at the forefront of the potato industry in Europe and the world, in both the quality and the variety of potatoes produced, but potato farmers need help to compete in a market that now demands higher quality. They need help to develop new varieties to meet the requirements of sophisticated households and the big chain stores.

This year, there are 25,000 tonnes of potatoes in dedicated stores and 14,000 tonnes in ambient stores, but there are another 60,000 tonnes of potatoes in old stores all over the place. Those potatoes will deteriorate, and will stop being marketable. I ask the Minister to pass on to the Minister responsible my urgent request for assistance to give some hope to the potato farmers, who used to lead the field in Europe and elsewhere.

Before I leave the subject of agriculture, may I ask the Minister to remind his fellow Minister about the Adjournment debate we had on the farming and countryside environmental scheme? That scheme is known as FACES—and there were lots of red faces in the Department of Agriculture, because the people there had made such a muff of it. The Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), promised an inquiry into the Department of Agriculture's handling of the scheme, and I should like to hear some word on how and when that will be initiated.

We have had many fishing debates, so I shall not delay the House by talking about fishing for very long. However, I would like a quick word on the subject, because the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority has imposed an increase of 50 per cent. on the landing levy on all catches in Northern Ireland.

The fishing industry is trying its best to keep its head above water economically—forgive the pun, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and the only reason given for that 50 per cent. increase in levies is that there is a small deficit in the budget of the NIFHA. It amounts to about £250,000, which in the context of the total budget is very little.

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

I shall now move on to talk about the Department of Economic Development. I re-echo the enthusiastic praises of the Industrial Development Board, and I envy its substantially increased budget. I hear with great joy of the inward investment and other indigenous successes for which the IDB claims credit, but I have another reason for being envious. As I have repeated ad nauseam to the House over the past 10 years, not one inward investment job has been created in the constituency of South Down, which is an area of social deprivation.

I saw a most interesting local statistic the other day—a House of Commons statistic about unemployment in the Northern Ireland constituencies. I got an awful shock when I looked at the figures for South Down, because they showed that, between January 1996 and January 1997, unemployment there had decreased by 19.3 per cent.

I scratched my head and wondered how that had happened, and where, in the name of God, those 1,222 jobs had come from, unbeknown to me. Then I looked more closely at the monthly statistics, and found that the phenomenon happened in September, October and November last year. If we cast our minds back, we can recall what happened in October and November. Those are statistics, damned statistics, and—but in this House I shall not go on to use the last phrase in that saying.

There has been no decrease in unemployment in South Down; there has simply been a transfer of statistics and a manipulation. We could not have had a 20 per cent. fall in unemployment in two months, yet that is what the statistics show. I stress that, over the past 10 years, not one inward investment has been made in the constituency of South Down, or even in the areas peripheral to it.

The second aspect of the proposed economic appropriations that causes great concern is the blanket cut imposed on the Training and Employment Agency. It is a dramatic cut, and what I have to say about it is similar to what I said about health. No one has looked at the consequences of the cut. The budget has simply been top-sliced, and the effects will filter down. No regard whatever has been paid to the quality of the schemes that will have to be abandoned, and no assessment has been made of the impact of the schemes on local communities.

Again, the areas of social deprivation and the people in the greatest need will suffer most. If there must be cuts, they should at least be made on a needs basis, taking account of social deprivation. There should not be a blanket cut.

I have good authority for saying that—no less an authority than the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who, in a statement on targeting on 10 December, said:

> "In programmes where I have had to make reductions, there may need to be some redistribution within the reduced totals to ensure that the most disadvantaged areas and people are targeted more clearly."

That simply has not been done. Did the Secretary of State not mean what he said, or is the Department simply ignoring him?

The Department of Finance and Personnel has been mentioned. The Minister of State has departmental responsibility for it, and there are some questions about the revaluations in Northern Ireland and about the subsequent announcement regarding transitional relief, which has been applied for the first two years, 1997–98 and 1998–99.

The revaluations are often totally unrealistic, and do not seem to be consistent. I am not a member of the hurrah brigade welcoming the transitional relief, because that is merely pushing part of the problem two years on. It is like the man who built a house on top of a hill without planning permission and painted it pink. When everyone objected, he said, "Okay, I'll paint it grey," and everyone was happy, but the house was still on top of the hill. The problem is still exactly the same. It is time for some meaningful investigation to be made into the consequences of the revaluations in terms of ratings in the commercial and economic sectors, which are vulnerable. That should be taken on board.

It is immoral, unacceptable and unchristian for young men and women, boys and girls, in our education system, and those who need health care, especially those with more extreme cases of illness, to suffer more because of the terrorists. There is something wrong with that concept. Again, I ask the Minister and all those responsible to say to the Treasury in London, "This is not right."

I am sure that the people of the entirety of the United Kingdom would agree that it is morally wrong and unchristian for those totally innocent and vulnerable people to be affected for the rest of their lives—be it the long lives of the primary school children or the short lives of the people on long waiting lists—not to get the funding they deserve, to enable them at least to be on a level playing field with the rest of the citizens of the UK.

8.52 pm

Sir David Mitchell (North–West Hampshire): This appropriation order probably provides my last opportunity to contribute to a debate on expenditure in Northern Ireland. I want to make three points; but first let me say that I recognise that it is about 13 years since I had the honour to serve as a Northern Ireland Minister with responsibility for the environment, and things should have changed since then. They have changed in terms of housing, with expenditure of about £608 million this year, in terms of jobs, and in many ways during the ceasefire, but, alas, the same intractable problems remain from one decade to the next.

If I have any credentials to speak, it is as one of the few Ministers whose departure from the Province was regretted by both the nationalist and the Unionist press. I also serve on the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, which met in Dublin this Monday and Tuesday.

My first point relates to local government. As hon. Members know, there are elected district councils in Northern Ireland, but their powers are not much greater than those of parish councils in Great Britain. Most of the work that would have been done by borough or county councils in Great Britain is, because of the McRory gap, carried out in Northern Ireland by the Department of the Environment.

My first proposition is that the Secretary of State should license some or all district councils to carry out a growing range of local government responsibilities normally carried out by district or county councils in Great Britain. I refer to licensing rather than to giving or transferring those powers, because I want it to be possible to withdraw the licences if a council acts in a way that discriminates against either the Unionist or the nationalist community.

I am very much aware that those in the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland, and Westminster Ministers, are scrupulously non-sectarian in their administration of local government in the Province. So are many district councils. Indeed, when a council has a clear majority, either Unionist or nationalist, there appears to be little discrimination; it is when there is near-equality that attempts to discriminate, and the temptation to discriminate, are likely to arise. That is why I believe that the powers should be granted only on licence. I think that that will give a new vitality to local government, and ensure that there is value for money in Northern Ireland.

I also think that there is a case—in advance of what I have just proposed and, indeed, in advance of the completion of the peace talks—for reactivating and giving real substance to an important but unrecognised responsibility of Northern Ireland district councils. In addition to the meagre duties that those councils now perform, they have a special consultation role, which I think should be enhanced: I think that the Department of the Environment should implement the priorities chosen by district councils, as long as such action is within their budgets, and as long as their purposes are non-sectarian.

I was going to refer to the approaching marching season and the enormous costs associated with policing it, but I fear that, if I did so, I would be out of order, so I shall simply say that it takes two to have a confrontation.

I referred to the meeting of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. During the two days that the meeting lasted, it covered BSE in cattle—north of the border as well as south—the International Fund for Ireland, the tourist industry and a host of other matters concerned with appropriations for Northern Ireland that the Minister mentioned in his opening speech. During that meeting in Dublin, a number of Members of Parliament sought to put the Unionist point of view—most particularly and outspokenly, my hon. Friend the Member for East Berkshire (Mr. MacKay).

I must say this to Unionist Members of Parliament: "Your friends do the best they can for you, but the authentic voice of Unionist Members would do a much better job." I hope that, before long, they will use the platform provided by that body to express their views, and to give Westminster and Dail Members a better understanding of Unionist policies, views and aspirations. A better understanding, on both sides of the border and both sides of the House, of the views of Northern Ireland Members in all the main parties would go a long way towards helping to redress the lack of understanding which, unfortunately, is so often the hallmark of Northern Ireland outside the Province.

8.57 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir D. Mitchell), who served with such distinction in Northern Ireland. He was not always very popular then, and we did not always agree with him, but we nearly always found him exceedingly helpful. He was invariably courteous, and at the end of the day we usually reached an agreement with him—in so far as that was possible, given the financial restrictions within which he, like all Ministers, had to operate. I am one of those who count him as a friend, and my colleagues and I are very sorry to see him depart. We wish that he had reconsidered and stayed for another term: his wisdom and understanding of the situation in Northern Ireland could have been put to good use.

This is always an important debate, but unfortunately it often skates over those things that do not appear like rocks above the surface of the administration of Northern Ireland at the time of any particular debate. I have often thought that we never get down to the nitty-gritty in the necessary detail. For that reason, my hon. Friends and I welcome very much the increased powers of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee and the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. It is there that we shall be able to ask the nasty questions that are difficult to answer. Often, it is not so much Ministers as civil servants who find them difficult. We want to get into the detail, to know what is going on, to know where the money is being spent, and to try to unravel the sometimes contorted thinking that leads the Government to their conclusions.

Not least is the question of rates, which was touched on by the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady). There has been a huge increase in the rateable valuations of commercial property. While that will lead to a considerable decrease in the rate in the pound that will be sought from proprietors, we know that it will also lead in many cases to the most massive increases on commercial properties. It is difficult to see how a profit can be made when such sums are requested. The trouble is that many of those who draw up the rates have never had to earn their crust in the commercial world. They sit in an office, look at values and play around with the figures. When the individual running a business in a town or village has to find the money, it is a different kettle of fish.

I have long had a deep concern that the rating valuation, even within a small area, is not creating a level playing field. The officials who decide the valuations of premises in Londonderry, Limavady or Coleraine will not be the same ones who decide it in Lisburn, Newry or Armagh. A regional rate is to be applied across the Province on those different rateable valuations. I have never been convinced that that is a level playing field.

The objective of my hon. Friends and me is the continuance of the thriving town centres with which we have lived. They have thrived because of the profitability of their family businesses, but they are being placed under increasing strain by out-of-town shopping centres which have lower rates per square foot. They also have the advantage being able to provide free parking. In town, people have to pay to park and will probably have to walk quite a bit, which is not so convenient. Increasingly, out-of-town shopping centres are a one-stop shop for the week or the month while town centre shops are slowly deteriorating. The hon. Member for North-West Hampshire nods. We know that that is happening in England. Northern Ireland was late in taking off in that direction, but it is not a direction that I welcome. No sensible body welcomes it. It will be reversed only when the costs of out-of-town shopping centres mean that they compete on a level economic footing with smaller businesses in town centres. That has not yet been achieved anywhere in the United Kingdom.

It is a big task, but it is one that the Government—and any future Government—must face if we are to have a middle-class, home-based commercial sector such as has been the life-blood of so many communities. Small

[Mr. William Ross]

businesses tend to spend their profits in the local community, while the profits of large national or multinational companies are spent in the streets of London. It is not healthy when so much of the commercial profit of this nation flows into the south-eastern corner of the country. From what I see around me, I believe that that point is well understood. Whether we receive an answer remains to be seen, but I hope that those in government and those who advise them will spend some time thinking about the dangerous situation that is being created.

It has been put to me that there is a tremendous delay in the valuation of Housing Executive property which is up for sale. The delay is several months from the application to buy. Until the valuation is given and a firm price is put on the house, the sale cannot proceed and the tenant has to continue paying rent, to no personal benefit. I have one or two cases of tenants who want to carry out improvements, but cannot do so. Whenever I inquired gently why the long delay seemed to occur, I was told that it was because the Valuation and Lands Agency had spent months doing nothing but rateable value revaluations. For that reason, the tenants of Housing Executive properties are now suffering. Could someone please examine the matter urgently and do something?

I know that the Government's process is such that they will not bring in any extra staff, but something should be done to allow the houses to be sold a little quicker. At the end of the process, the Valuation and Lands Agency lost the contract for valuation of Housing Executive properties. It is now being done by a Belfast firm which employs local estate agents to do the job. So concentrating its fire on one particular point because the Government insisted that it do so has not helped the lands valuation system in Northern Ireland. Perhaps someone could examine the consequences of overloading a service for a period and the consequences for the customers—in this case, the Housing Executive tenants. I suspect that if Housing Executive tenants face delays in obtaining valuations, many other people who seek valuations of property face long delays, with untold financial consequences.

I have special responsibility as agriculture spokesman within my party for the farming community. Once, the people of Ireland north and south rejoiced in the fact that they had a double water barrier between themselves and all the diseases of the continent. The European ideal is a single market in which all the barriers disappear. The barriers were not only to trade, but to disease. Now we have blue-ear disease in pigs and Newcastle disease is spreading among poultry.

When a spokesman from the Irish Republic was asked how his country had escaped the outbreak of Newcastle disease, he simply answered, "We have had a strong south-west wind," and he was probably right. We are now vaccinating birds rather than slaughtering them in an effort to clear up Newcastle disease. I understand that any vaccination programme suppresses rather than gets rid of a disease. I am curious about whether a serious effort is to be made to clear Northern Ireland of Newcastle disease so that we can return to the standards of health that we enjoyed until a few weeks ago.

The problem of bovine spongiform encephalopathy is now a year old. I will not add to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) said, except to say that Northern Ireland should always have been looked upon as the test of the good faith of the European nations and whether they would accept that the cull was sufficient to open the door to United Kingdom beef. Within a few weeks, Northern Ireland will meet the criteria and we shall then see whether Europe is genuine or whether it is using all its demands as an excuse to keep United Kingdom beef out of Europe. The Minister should keep up the good work and keep the pressure on. We should complete the cull to see what those in Europe then say. We will then know whether we are dealing with friends or foes. We will then know whether we are dealing with people who are clear and honest in their demands or whether they are using those demands simply as an excuse to protect their beef industries through the back door.

In Northern Ireland, in common with everywhere else, there is increasing concern about the environment. The principal polluter in Northern Ireland is the Department of the Environment. The Minister is not happy about that, but he is stuck with that nasty label. We hope that he or his successors, whoever they may be, will manage to deal with the problem of the DOE in a few years. I hope that higher standards will be applied constantly so that we can get rid of the environmental problems from that particular source.

We are still left with the problem of farm pollution, which is another serious difficulty. When I was a boy, I remember that the pollutant in rivers that caused fish to die was flax water. When the flax was rendered in dams, the water was made devoid of oxygen and so the poor fish died. Today, flax has been replaced by a material a thousand times more deadly—silage effluent and slurry. That is a constant problem in the rivers and lakes of Northern Ireland. I believe that not enough has been done on farms to provide storage for such fluids.

I accept that it is a costly business to build silage tanks. Some farmers have opted for the big bale system of silage to overcome a great deal of the silage effluent problem. If the Government are considering ways in which to help agriculture, I hope that they will look seriously at means of restoring a grant system for the building and refurbishment of storage tanks for all kinds of farm effluent. That would be a great help.

Farming has never been the prosperous business that it is believed to be by those outside the industry. It has always had difficulties. I should like to believe that continuing help will be provided to farmers to erect buildings for shelter for man and beast, especially in the winter months when stock must be brought in. The problem relating to the provision of such buildings has not been properly addressed in the past few years.

The hon. Member for South Down, who has had to leave the Chamber, referred to the problem of potatoes. I do not wish to add to his remarks, but I encourage the Government to consider carefully whether anything can be done to help that sector, which was once such a major part of the agriculture industry of Northern Ireland. It has fallen on such hard times that the huge seed potato industry has vanished. We should try to reverse that outcome.

Other difficulties relate to the use of marginal land. Some years ago, I planted a few acres of trees. I like trees, and some were planted as an amenity and some as a long-term investment. The acreage was small, but I learned a lot, including the fact that the effort of clearing

existing growth before the planting of trees is an unprofitable business. One makes money from trees only when they are cut down, but even with Sitka spruce one has to wait between 30 and 35 years. If one grazed even sheep on such land for 35 years, I suspect that they would return a much higher profit. That activity would also yield a profit every year; one would not have to wait for it.

If the Government plan to increase the planting of timber in Northern Ireland, especially broad-leaved species, they should consider carefully any incentives that they may want to give to farmers, especially to those who plant small acreages of trees. In 20 years, such areas would add to the amenity value of the countryside. Plenty of things could be done, even by comparatively small landowners, in that regard.

I have a continuing anxiety about the long-term future of farming. The age profile of farmers and workers on the land in Northern Ireland is far too high. We have a problem with getting more young people into farms. I was sitting counting up mentally the number of farms in my own townland 25 or 30 years ago. Where there were 10 full-time farmers, today there are two. That says much about the efficiency of the industry, but it also shows the tremendous drop in the number of people who earn their living from the land, because the decrease in farmers is repeated in every townland in Northern Ireland.

There comes a point in time, which I believe that we have reached, when there are just too few hands—too few people working the land. I believe in the family farm, but that really is a farm that produces an income for two families—father and son. That is the only way to have a truly viable farm. Below that, at the bottom end of the scale, are the smaller, part-time farmers—people who have another job and who farm half as a hobby and half for the extra income. In between are the many farms in Northern Ireland that produce only a one-family income, and they will have increasing difficulty.

Ministers should therefore try diligently to improve farming education and, above all, to improve business training for the farming community. Farmers are good at producing food, caring for animals and growing crops, but they are not trained in the business world in which they now have to operate. That problem should receive far more attention than it has received so far.

When I spoke in the corresponding debate in 1996, I said that we were told that three quarters of jobs had to go to deprived areas. I wonder whether that remains Government policy—if it has been Government policy in the past 12 months—and, if so, which of those deprived areas have benefited. Have they got the three quarters of incoming jobs—and, if not, why not?

Specifically, may I be told why there appears to be such a large and continuing imbalance in the visits made by potential investors to different areas? I notice that Newry and Armagh received eight visits in 1993, five in 1994 and 28 in 1995. I have not found out how many visits they have received this year, but there has been a remarkable increase.

On the other hand, my inquiries suggest that there have been few, if any, visits in other areas. Limavady has fared very badly, Magherafelt has done no better, and Coleraine—a fairly important town in the Northern Ireland context—received eight visits in 1993, one in 1994 and five in 1995. I hope that those figures have improved considerably, because East Londonderry has the unhappy distinction of being one of those constituencies in Northern Ireland with very high unemployment. We badly need more inward investment there—or, even better, more encouragement for the home-grown investor, who should be the backbone of our economy.

Disappointingly, it appears that this year the Training and Employment Agency will not take on young people until September. I understand that last year it took on 6,000 young people when they left school, about 1,200 or 1,400 of whom returned to school in September. As a result, this year we are told, "We are not taking on any; we are waiting until September to see who goes back to school."

One thing that Northern Ireland does not need, in what may prove to be a long, hot summer, is 6,000 or 7,000 young people running around with nothing to do. I encourage the Minister to re-examine the issue seriously. Last year, some young people who did not intend to go back to school went back, and some of those who had always intended to go back to school went back, but at least they were given some training in the world of work, and that was time well spent.

Finally, I have not yet managed to work out how much is being clawed back for security. I remember all the money that was promised for capital build projects in schools last year. The figures looked good; then we were told that the money was not to be spent until the next financial year. I assume, therefore, that much of the capital spending for this year is already in the pipeline, and that the money for capital projects recently announced this year is for spending in the next financial year. Either way, we should be told.

May we be given a list of the headings of expenditure that are being reduced to pay for extra security? May we also have a full comparison with the headings that were given increased allocations during the so-called dividend that resulted from the IRA ceasefire? I for one have not yet managed to get the figures to add up. The people of Northern Ireland deserve to be told in rather clearer terms exactly what the peace dividend and the clawback amount to.

9.20 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid–Ulster): Because of the nature of the problem facing my constituents and the people of Northern Ireland, I regard this as one of our most important debates. We are discussing a major transfer of money that will have an impact on every sector of our community. That is why I am so disappointed by the empty Benches in the Chamber. It may seem easy to condemn the lack of money for education, the health service or for other major public services, and to describe the tremendous pressure under which we representatives of the people find ourselves because of the lack of finance to meet their needs. But I honestly believe that hon. Members should take the opportunity of this debate to make their opinions heard. This is the place where elected representatives ought to express their serious concerns about the impact of the settlement on their constituencies.

Northern Ireland Members of Parliament, including me, believe in value for money. I do not believe in spending money for the sake of spending it. I believe that every pound should count and that we should try to extract the most value from every pound spent. I also agree—this point was touched on earlier by my hon. Friend the

[Rev. William McCrea]

Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley)—that it is immoral of the Government to take away from the children and the elderly of Ulster the money that is so important to their future well-being—money for education and the health service. It is wrong to take away that money because of a terrorist campaign that is not the responsibility of those people—yet they are the ones suffering because of the campaign. Adding to their suffering from the campaign by taking away funds that are necessary for the services that the community needs is simply adding insult to injury. I trust, however, that Northern Ireland Ministers will go back to the Treasury and ask for more money to meet needs in the Province which I—and many Ministers too—believe must be met.

I wish to pay tribute to the hon. Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir D. Mitchell), who spoke earlier, for his interest in Northern Ireland. I remember the time when he was a Minister in Northern Ireland. I was the vice-president of the Northern Ireland Local Authorities Association at the time. He was an excellent Minister and showed tremendous concern for the people of Northern Ireland. If those were his last comments on Northern Ireland in the House, I want to express on behalf of my colleagues our deep appreciation for the service that he gave to the people of Northern Ireland as a Minister.

The first vote this evening is that for the Department of Agriculture. I come from a rural constituency, Mid-Ulster, and not surprisingly I am deeply concerned about what is happening in the agricultural community. Over recent months, members of the farming community have spoken to me about their depression and feeling of hopelessness. Many of them are facing financial ruin and problems to which they were not contributors—for example, BSE. Northern Ireland farmers, like others, were not responsible for that major problem facing the farming community, but unfortunately it has caused them intolerable suffering.

Farmers face further difficulties from Newcastle disease, the blue ear problem in the pig industry, and the problem in the potato industry. The Department must assist them. I hope that when the noble Lady, the Under-Secretary of State, reads the debate, she will do all that she can to help in every sector. I mentioned the potato industry because I believe that it has been regarded by many as the poor relation of the agricultural industry, and that market has collapsed.

Moving on to the Department of the Environment, we have expressed on numerous occasions in the House our concern about the axing of ACE jobs. In the light of the representations that have been made in relation to that problem, the proposals should be reconsidered.

We have serious concerns about road maintenance in Mid-Ulster, which has vast road mileage. Rather than coping, we seem to be getting into ever deeper problems of road maintenance. I trust that the Minister will turn his attention to the problem of road gritting, as many major accidents have been caused by the lack of gritting at appropriate times. Forecasts of frost are broadcast on radio and television, but even when ample warning is given, little heed is paid.

My colleagues and I had a meeting with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. One of the topics discussed was renovation grants. The backlog of cases must be dealt with, which will take a considerable sum, but the money should be provided so that people can live in conditions that are appropriate for the beginning of the 21st century.

Can the Minister tell us when the area plan for Cookstown will be concluded? The old area plan for the Magherafelt area is now out of date—it expired in 1996—but I understand that work on a new plan has not yet started. That is holding up vital planning approvals in our area. It is totally wrong that, because there has been neglect in providing a new area plan for Magherafelt, ordinary decent people of the community are held to ransom. It is to be deeply regretted that, as the Department with responsibility for roads, the Department of the Environment, tells us, the Magherafelt bypass has been in the plan for the past 15 or 20 years and is still no further forward.

The upgrading of the M2 is essential, as is the Cookstown bypass. It will not take a tremendous amount of money to meet the need for some of these schemes, but that money is not forthcoming. I trust that there will be announcements that we will receive the money that is necessary. Money is also needed for the continuation and widening of the road from Coagh to Arboe and for the footpath in Coagh village.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim mentioned quite a few matters in relation to the Department of Education that are causing concern. However, it is not only to be regretted, but disgraceful that nursery provision in Northern Ireland is going to be held back when we should be moving forward on this. Expectations were built up and there is much disappointment.

On the building programme, I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) has been successful in relation to Belmont primary school. That has been going for many years. I have heard him mention that school, but many of the schools in my constituency face an intolerable situation of mobile classrooms, yet we are not able to get away from that.

Although additional funding has been made available in England and Wales, in Northern Ireland, there have been cuts in education and in the research grant for universities, which is not only to be regretted, but to be deplored.

The Under–Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who is winding up, certainly has the health portfolio as well. Because of time, I will just touch on these matters, but I trust that, some day, the Prime Minister who occupies the Dispatch Box will tell us that the pensioners of the United Kingdom will receive not a miserable pension, but an appropriate pension, so that they are not left to spend their last few days in a poverty trap with inadequate provision.

Many of our elderly people using home helps and in community care face intolerable problems. Some have 15 minutes a week of home help. That is absolutely disgusting and an insult to those people. Care has been removed from hospital to the community, yet the finances have not been brought along with that and many people feel neglected. The elderly are deeply concerned, especially those in their latter years.

Recently, I have had numerous communications concerning the changes in social security offices. It is said that many hundreds of social security offices throughout our Province are threatened with closure by 1998, with a

transfer of jobs from the public to the private sector, which will administer the detailed finances in the cheapest way, so many people will lose their job.

I want to express appreciation to the Minister of State, on the rates in the revaluation. He listened to the representation that was made. I thank him for his concern in the matter and for listening to that representation with care. I ask him, however, to consider the £10,000 level because I am led to believe that that was the level when the matter was considered on the mainland some years ago. We have moved on and valuations have been raised since then. Therefore, will he consider that level further? It would alleviate the problems of many people who face an intolerable burden. Will he review that level in the interests of many of our constituents?

9.34 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): If the Minister cannot continue his reply to this morning's debate—which touched on appropriation issues—in his reply to this debate, we look forward to receiving replies in writing.

In last Thursday's Northern Ireland Question Time, a question was asked about the action for community employment programme. The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office made the point that we will have to suffer because of the problems caused by the resumption of terrorism and violence. In a speech on a different occasion, the Secretary of State compared the current situation with that during the second world war, when we all had to tighten our belts and suffer. There is a distinct difference, however, because on that occasion Northern Ireland suffered with the rest. Although there were those within the then free state who were not prepared to allow the British Government to conscript in Northern Ireland, we sent volunteers. People in our own family made the supreme sacrifice.

Our people have been suffering, although it seems wrong to use that type of argument in this context. When the announcement was made on a replacement for Britannia, it was said that it would be financed out of the reserve fund. I thought that that was interesting because, although we are supposed to be a bankrupt nation, we still have reserves. Instead of putting pressure on the budget for the needy in Northern Ireland, perhaps we should have taken more money out of reserves to deal with the problem.

I should like quickly to mention several matters. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) mentioned the railway system. Over the years, the Minister and his predecessors have received much correspondence from me about the stretch of line between the old Great Northern station, which will be the new Belfast Central, and the Lisburn Road and the Great Northern track. We were told that there was not a real problem but a minor problem that would be dealt with on this or that occasion.

We are now being told that the situation is worse than had been realised. Why has it turned out to be worse? Local residents and myself went on the track to illustrate the problems. They performed some simple repairs, such as filling in holes, and showed that our assessment of the problem was correct. When will the situation be dealt with—not only for the benefit of the residents but for the benefit of our entire economy? In our drive to increase exports, we use the railway to take traffic off the road system.

I apologise for my earlier statement that redundancies in education would cost £50 million. In the back of my mind, I was thinking about the £50-odd million in the health budget. Redundancies in education will cost about £5.5 million., which is still rather high.

I return to the decision taken by education boards and others that there will be no summer schemes this year for those with mental handicaps. Such schemes are not simply social. Anyone who knows anything about education knows that those children must be regularly stimulated, and that such schemes are educational rather than simple child minding. It is also a service to parents. If parents break down because they have to give that extra attention to their children, those children will have to be taken into care, creating a larger expense for the community budget. Therefore, I ask and plead that further consideration be given to the matter. The simple explanation that has been offered—that there are not sufficient trained staff—is not the real one. The real explanation is that we are prepared to withdraw services that young people need because of a lack of finance. Where there is a will, there is a way. I am convinced that we could find the money if we were prepared to do so.

I urge the Minister to give us at least a chink of light to suggest that our concerns will be addressed. I recognise the difficulties in moving money from one budget to another, but I was struck by the £14 million underspend in the health budget, which has been carried over. That happened at a time when we were told that there was no money in the budget. We need closer scrutiny of the movement of money in the health service.

Whether people like it or not, the management executive has become the holding company of the health service and there are different firms in the service. As I understand industry, if there is a pressure in one company under such a holding company, money can be moved temporarily from where there is a surplus to meet needs elsewhere. If that is the structure, it is time that the management executive began to deal with the issue seriously.

I do not want to prolong the debate, although I could return to issues that we raised this morning. I am happy to share with my colleagues who raised the issues. We would love to know not only where the money has to be spent, but from where it is being saved.

9.40 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I should like to put on record immediately my endorsement of the remarks of the hon. Members for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and for South Down (Mr. McGrady) about the axing of the summer scheme for those with a mental handicap. I cannot believe that a Minister, when deciding where to make an incision, could choose that area. If the Minister saw the enjoyment that the children at Torbank school in my area get out of the summer scheme and the relief that their parents get, he would look elsewhere for his cuts. I know that my colleagues from other areas have had similar concerns expressed to them. There is to be a public meeting on the subject in my area tomorrow night. I trust that the Minister understands that there is concern among all hon. Members from Northern Ireland about the issue. I hope that he will take that concern on board and see what he can do. He should review the decision and change his mind. That would be welcomed by all parties.

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

I should also like to put on record my appreciation to the Education Minister that justice has at last been done for Belmont primary school. It is, alas, too late for the present headmistress, who has served the school for many years but who will be ending her service this year and will therefore not see the new school open during her period of stewardship. When he writes to us at the end of the debate, will the Minister give me an idea of when the work will start? There are some nasty rumours going about that, although the project has been included in the expenditure that the Minister announced recently, it could well be more than a year before anything begins to happen.

I ask the Environment Minister, who is to wind up the debate, to take on board the concerns expressed at a public meeting in Dundonald last night about the Comber road. In a short period, 105 accidents—including two fatalities—have been reported on that road. The road is narrow, and has a number of bends. The area has poor lighting and some large housing estates have been built nearby that come out on to that B road. The only plans are for about 250 m of improvement. The area is so dangerous that the Minister must consider trying to get a scheme up and running to remove that danger. My wife, who represents that area, received a telephone call at 8.30 this morning and was told that, following last night's public meeting, another accident had occurred in which a car hit a telegraph pole. I urge the Minister to examine the matter urgently.

In the past few days, the Minister has announced the planned merger of the hospital trust and the community trust. The hospital trust had been a thorn in the Minister's side as it had been helpful in advising elected representatives of the real difficulties that it faced. At one stage, it was forced to consider the possibility of making 200 nurses redundant because the money would not stretch to the end of the financial year. The Minister injected a small amount of money into the hospital, which did not balance the books, but at least allowed for a manageable overspend.

The Minister may correct me if I am wrong, but some people suspect that he has taken punitive action against a hospital trust that was drawing attention to underfunding and wiped it out by merging it with the community trust. They claim that he is trying to avoid awkward questions about the matter in the Public Accounts Committee. Perhaps he will tell us in his winding-up speech about his intentions regarding the trust. When our attention is drawn to underfunding in the health service, I do not think that it is appropriate to respond by removing resistance in the form of those who have served the community well.

The Ulster, North Down and Ards Hospitals health and social services trust is badly underfunded. I do not blame the Minister totally, as the situation is due not simply to the amount of money that the Government have allocated to the health service but to a breakdown in the money to the various boards. The Eastern health and social services board is underfunded in relation to the other boards, and the health trust is underfunded compared with others in the Eastern area. The problem will not be solved simply by wiping away the hospital trust by merging it with the community trust. That move may cost money. Has the Minister calculated the cost of the redundancies? I remember one redundancy costing £300,000. That money would be put to better use funding the health service.

Time does not permit me to refer to several other issues, and I know that Front Benchers wish to address a number of matters. I am delighted about the tremendous news, announced by Shorts in the past few weeks, regarding the regional jet. Shorts is to get additional work as a result of the Canada contract, which will secure jobs in the company and create additional employment. The Ministry of Defence contract for 1,000 new missiles is also good news for Shorts. It will benefit other areas besides east Belfast. The hon. Member for South Down complained that the Industrial Development Board did not consider his constituency for inward investment. People come from Ballynahinch, Grossgar and the surrounding areas to work for Shorts. Subcontract work is going to many places in the Greater Belfast area, and probably beyond it.

I trust that the Minister will discuss with the MOD the ASTOR contract for an airborne platform for reconnaissance. The MOD was supposed to make an announcement towards the end of March, but we have not heard a squeak about it so far. I hope that there will be no slippage in announcing that programme, which would be vital for the Shorts group.

I referred briefly to the Dundonald training school in the Grand Committee, and I ask the Government to reconsider the matter. I ask the Opposition to do the same, because they could well be the Government when action on the Dundonald training school could still be taken. For the want of £0.25 million to repair a roof, that training school is to be closed. It is one of 10 training centres in Northern Ireland that are strategically placed so that the whole of the Province is covered. By taking that training centre away, the north Down, Strangford and east Belfast area will lose out compared with the rest of the Province. Baroness Denton announced a speculative scheme in west Belfast that will cost £2 million, and there is no one to move into the factory, whereas £0.25 million would ensure that 300 places are kept in the Dundonald centre.

I wanted to go into detail about the loss of ACE jobs and about jobseekers. I touched on the matter in the Grand Committee, and I will allow that to satisfy me.

I ask the Minister to consider the Dundonald training centre. We must not allow it to be taken out of the overall scheme in Northern Ireland. I hope that I will get a ready response from the Opposition, and that they will do their part, if and when they are in government, to ensure that the centre remains open. I look forward to having a positive response from them, if not from the present Government.

9.50 pm

Mr. Dowd *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can speak only with the leave of hon. Members.

Mr. Dowd: I was about to ask for that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is leave granted for 10 minutes?

Mr. Dowd: I would speak for 10 minutes, but we would run out of time.

I want to give the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) my assurance that, should the British people give us the opportunity, we will certainly consider the Dundonald training school if it still exists. We will consider all the training programmes.

Sir John Wheeler: Where will the money come from?

Mr. Dowd: It is strange that the Minister did not want me to speak, but that he now wants me to answer questions. I will happily tell him. I will send him details of our five pledges, which include using the windfall levy—*[Interruption.]* It seems that the Minister knew all along; he was only pretending. We shall consider all issues related to training, especially training of the long-term unemployed. If the Dundonald centre is still there, it will certainly come under that review.

I wanted to say only two things in response to the debate. What I want to say to the Minister is education, education, education. If the hon. Members for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), for South Down (Mr. McGrady), for North–West Hampshire (Sir D. Mitchell), for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), for Mid–Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) and for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) will forgive me, I shall mention only the speech of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux). If that was his last contribution, he has brought a distinguished career to a distinguished conclusion.

9.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss): I was going to begin by offering my congratulations to the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd), not because he will be taking my job soon, but because it is his 46th birthday today. I wish him happy birthday. It is my birthday tomorrow, but I am older than 46.

Rev. Ian Paisley: How old?

Mr. Moss: I am not saying.

I shall begin by re-emphasising a point made by the Secretary of State on a number of occasions, but most recently towards the end of last year, which underpins the decisions taken in the latest public expenditure survey round. This issue has been raised by many hon. Members, who have asked why we have redistributed the peace dividend moneys by taking them from front-line services and putting them into security and law and order. We have often said that if violence resumed, the savings in the law and order budget that were released for the benefit of other programmes in the 1994 and 1995 public expenditure surveys may have to be restored. That was reiterated by the Secretary of State in December 1996. He added that, in total, almost £120 million extra was being provided for security and compensation over the survey period. He said that he would have much preferred to have used the money on, for example, job creation, schools, hospitals and housing, but that the peace dividend had, alas, been reversed and that that had obviously had an adverse effect on the provision of public services in Northern Ireland.

I shall reply to a number of questions raised by the hon. Member for Lewisham, West, which were reiterated by many other hon. Members. He asked why I made my announcement in a parliamentary answer. I did so to inform hon. Members of the Government's public expenditure plans before they were announced publicly. The hon. Gentleman asked whether expenditure put back into law and order for this year could be reversed if there were to be a ceasefire tomorrow. The answer is yes: if circumstances allow, resources can be moved to other programmes. That question was also asked by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) and the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). We can vire money interdepartmentally and, if there was a ceasefire and it was possible to make savings in the law and order budget, we could look carefully at where the money could best be spent in other Departments.

Many hon. Members asked about the BSE programme. Tracing visits started in Northern Ireland on 20 January and the slaughter of about 1,500 home-bred animals is to be completed within about eight weeks. The first slaughtering took place on 28 February, when 206 animals were slaughtered.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, West and most other hon. Members asked about the cuts in the ACE programme. The ACE provision must be seen in the context of an improving economic situation in Northern Ireland. Over the past five years, the Northern Ireland index of manufacturing output has increased by 18.7 per cent. compared with an increase of just 9.1 per cent. in the United Kingdom as a whole. Unemployment has fallen by a record amount. Seasonally adjusted unemployment at January 1997 was 9.2 per cent. of the work force, its lowest level for 16 years.

Significantly, there was also a fall of nearly 8,300 in the long-term unemployed. I believe that it was the hon. Member for Belfast, South who talked about the change in unemployment figures as a result of the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance. More directly, Northern Ireland has had a seasonal record of more than 573,000 people in jobs.

The Dundonald training centre was raised by the hon. Members for Lewisham, West and for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). It is understandable that the decision to close the training centre has been greeted locally with some dismay. There are a number of reasons for the closure. It has been increasingly difficult to attract young people to the centre and, currently, there are only 286 trainees as against a capacity of 408. Considerable capital building work needs to be undertaken to keep the centre operational. Also, there is already adequate alternative provision within the area for training opportunities and there are vacancies for trainees elsewhere in the training centre network.

Several hon. Members asked about the regional rate. An order to make the regional rate for 1997–98 will be brought forward next week. On transitional relief, the focus is on smaller properties which will be facing the largest increases in rates. There are two conditions for transitional relief. First, the net annual value of the property must be £10,000 or less and, secondly, the increase in the bill due to revaluation must be greater than 25 per cent. The scheme offers 100 per cent. relief in the first year, two-thirds relief in the second year and a third in the third year. The full bill is payable from the fourth year. The scheme is automatic and no applications are required.

[Mr. Moss]

The hon. Members for Belfast, South and for Lewisham, West asked about the railways, particularly the upgrade of the Belfast-Dublin rail link. Work on the upgrade is progressing and we hope that the new trains will be running by mid-1997. We have run into some problems on the section mentioned by the hon. Member for Belfast, South, between the City hospital and Lisburn. In the past two or three years, it has deteriorated more rapidly than expected, necessitating the bringing forward of work planned for the next century.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, West and others mentioned housing. The total resources for housing for the financial year 1997–98 are planned to be £608 million, which is similar to the likely outturn for the previous year. The resources are planned to increase to some £616 million in 1998–99 and to £623 million in 1999–2000. Those substantial resources demonstrate the Government's continued commitment to this important social programme.

The resources earmarked for the pre-school voucher scheme have been retained in the education budget. Legislation currently before Parliament will provide the Government with enabling powers to introduce the scheme to Northern Ireland when the requisite resources become available.

It being Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [13 February].*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

POLICE (INSURANCE OF VOLUNTARY ASSISTANTS) BILL *[LORDS]* [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Police (Insurance of Voluntary Assistants) Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums which under any other Act are payable out of money so provided.—[*Mr. Coe.*]

Resolved,

Motion made, and Question proposed,

War Crimes

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

10 pm

Sir Cyril Townsend (Bexleyheath): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate again the War Crimes Act 1991. I last had an Adjournment debate on the subject on 9 July 1992. Since then, of course, Britain's first war crimes trial has collapsed. My message is clear—the absurd business should never have begun and should now be brought immediately to a halt before further police time and public money are wasted.

The case against the Act is even stronger now than it was in 1991. The issue attracts powerful emotions. It has divided both sides of the House, and it has divided the House from another place. I believe that that controversial and peculiar legislation first arose from a visit paid to the state of Israel by Baroness Thatcher when she was Prime Minister. The Israeli authorities disliked her strong and justified words about the way in which they treated the Palestinians. Looking for something to help improve her relations with the Israeli Government, Baroness Thatcher agreed to consider allowing trials of alleged war criminals said to be living in Britain.

As a result, the Home Secretary of the day set up an inquiry which was asked to examine documents submitted by the Simon Wiesenthal centre, which is itself controversial. Sir Thomas Hetherington and Mr. William Chalmers submitted their report to the Home Secretary in June 1989. It is worth noting how long ago their report was written and how slowly events have moved since then. One wonders whether the authors of that report would still be in favour of prosecutions after such a long delay. I suspect not.

The inquiry considered 369 cases and it recommended that 75 of them should be accorded further investigation. Amazingly, those involved reached the conclusion that there were only three individuals against whom evidence existed to meet the demands for prosecutions. In the parliamentary debates that followed, the Commons backed the legislation. Some 55 Tory Members—including myself, I am proud to say—voted against the legislation. I welcome the Minister who will reply to the debate, but I could not find out how he voted. It looks as if he abstained, but perhaps he will comment on that point.

I understand that the Prime Minister voted against the concept of legislation right at the beginning of the proceedings. Certainly, strong views were expressed in the Cabinet against such legislation. The other place rejected legislation by an overwhelming majority, the Law Lords apparently being unwilling to go down that path.

Conservative peers who opposed the legislation were led by those of the calibre of Lord Carrington, Lord Hailsham, Lord Home of The Hirsel and Lord Havers. Such peers represented the generation that lived through the second world war. They knew better than younger people of the Nazi horrors, the holocaust and, of course, the Nuremberg trials. In their speeches, those people constantly referred to the decision by Bevan, Attlee and Churchill in 1948 to cease war crimes trials. With those most responsible for the war largely sentenced, those three eminent politicians thought that it would be wrong to reach down and seek to prosecute every lance-corporal in Hitler's SS for what had happened.

In both Houses, many speakers mentioned that the legislation would be retrospective—something about which many of us are always extremely cautious.

The Act is directed against a small group of men, now British citizens but formerly citizens of the Baltic states, who are accused of being responsible for murders in German-occupied territory during the second world war.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Was not the essence of the legislation the fact that those men were not British citizens? Had they been British citizens when they committed or may have committed the crimes, they would have been liable to be prosecuted for murder. There was therefore a lacuna in the law, which treated those who were not born British more favourably than those who were.

Sir Cyril Townsend: My hon. Friend has a valid point; a murder is a murder. Had those men remained in the original territories and had they been tried at an earlier stage, all would have been well. I do not dispute my hon. Friend's observation.

I object to the fact that the legislation is so restricted—restricted to those few men. It does not attempt to cover the all too many atrocities committed elsewhere during and after the war. For example, my father fought in the Burma campaign. The Japanese war crimes are ignored, although the treatment of British prisoners of war was horrendous. More recent crimes committed in Palestine, Cambodia and Iraq are not covered either. The legislation is highly restricted. That is the point that I would put to my hon. Friend.

The House of Commons does not come out well as a result of its support for the legislation. A tiny, well-financed overseas pressure group seeking revenge and retribution was able to have far too much influence on the Commons. I suspect that too many of my colleagues found it prudent to go along with the legislation rather than to take a stand—although I must add that I was under no particular pressure from my Bexleyheath constituents. I suggest that that was a bad case of the tail wagging the dog, and of Parliament being pushed around by pressure groups.

Will the legislation reduce anti-Semitism? Obviously, that would be the objective of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) and myself. In a letter to *The Times* on 29 July 1989, Lord Shawcross, the chief prosecutor at Nuremberg, expressed views that also represent mine:

> "Revival of these sad and terrible matters by sensational trials of a small handful of aged men, which will take years to conduct and which will start with an assumption of guilt, will not help to promote understanding and friendship between the different peoples of the world, will not help eliminate the evils of anti-semitism nor, still less, enhance respect for British justice".

There are many aspects of the Act, and in a short debate I shall not have time to touch on them all, but I shall raise some of them briefly.

When the Bill went through Parliament, its supporters, including Ministers, drew attention to the experience of Canada, Australia and Israel, which had passed laws along roughly the same lines. Subsequent experience in those countries has confirmed the worst expectations of the Bill's opponents. Israel, for example, had the grim and ghastly affair of the wrong Ivan the Terrible being convicted. Will the Minister list those countries that are still proceeding in that regard? I think that Russia is one of the very few.

I said in my previous Adjournment debate that the bill could be perhaps £10 million before this shocking affair is behind us. What has been spent so far? *The Guardian* claimed on 4 February this year that £6 million had gone towards the Metropolitan police costs and £2 million for the Crown Prosecution Service. When the time of Ministers and civil servants is properly taken into account, my figure of £10 million still looks possible. Press reports have suggested a figure of £15 million.

In a parliamentary question in July 1992 I asked how many police officers, of what ranks, were employed in police work flowing from the War Crimes Act 1991. I was told that in England and Wales there were one detective chief superintendent, one detective chief inspector, three detective inspectors, one detective sergeant, three detective constables and two police constables: a total of 11. The figure in Scotland was three.

The Metropolitan police war crimes unit was also supported by seven civilians. I hope that the Minister will tell the House what action, if any, is still going on in New Scotland Yard. Is the unit still in existence, albeit frozen? Is the Metropolitan police budget making any contribution at this stage, as was suggested some years ago? It would be wrong if that were the case, because war crimes are a national not a local matter.

As a London Member, I say unhesitatingly that the time of those 11 officers could and should have been much better spent dealing with today's terrorists, murderers, rapists and burglars in the Metropolitan police area. Surely the Minister will recognise that a detective chief superintendent is a most valuable individual—a key piece on the crime chessboard—whose time, dealing, for example, with London's new armed gangs and the masters of the drugs scene, could have brought major benefits.

According to the Lord Advocate, there are to be no war crimes trials in Scotland. What is the future of war crimes trials in England in 1997? A few weeks ago, Szymon Serafinowicz, an 86-year-old retired carpenter from Banstead in Surrey, was found unfit to stand trial by an Old Bailey jury. They had heard evidence that he was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. He had faced serious charges of murdering unknown Jews in Belarus between 1941 and March 1942. That is a long time ago. The Minister himself did not grace our world until April 1945.

What exact details can anyone recall in 1997 of events in 1941, 56 years ago? The trials revolve around correct identification, as the Israelis found so embarrassingly to their cost. A few years ago, after the comparatively recent riots at Wapping, I was intrigued to see that a judge dismissed a trial on the ground that the events took place too long ago for people to be able to recall the exact details.

The more atrocious the crime, the more scrupulously the rules of criminal justice should be observed. Lord Donaldson, when Master of the Rolls, pointed out that a case turning on identification 45 years after an alleged offence was a preposterous proposition. What would he think of a period of 50 or even 60 years?

The Director of Public Prosecutions has, for various reasons that I am not clear about, refused to set a cut-off point for the trials. I do not believe that war crimes trials held in the inevitable blaze of publicity can possibly add

[Sir Cyril Townsend]

to the reputation of our legal system—at the moment, a rather damaged reputation—but they could certainly harm it further.

The reality is that more than 100 people on the initial list of suspects have died. The tiny and pathetic group of elderly people who remain on the list—I believe that we are still talking of about five people—have nothing left to offer, and a short while left to live. It would now be amazing if a successful prosecution took place, and even more amazing if an individual were sent to prison—most likely to the prison hospital.

The journalist Milton Shulman wrote a few years ago:

"There is no excuse for these proceedings which have become an aberration of British justice. It is intolerable that such an inhuman and costly fiasco should continue to run and run."

In a leading article in January 1995, *The Daily Telegraph* had this to say:

"None of this should be taken to imply that any of us should forget or excuse the WAR CRIMES and their perpetrators. The wickedness of those who committed dreadful deeds 50 or more years ago is not in doubt. But when the resources of police forces up and down the land are stretched to the limit, to devote millions to WAR CRIMES investigations that have such scant prospects of success is not only futile, but profligate.

The WAR CRIMES BILL was chiefly a personal folly of Lady Thatcher in her last months of office . . . Large sums of public money have been wasted in pursuit of objectives which most sensible voices from the outset declared to be unattainable."

Exactly so—and further large sums of public money will continue to be wasted until this fiasco is killed off. It would have been much more sensible to spend the millions of pounds that have been spent on, for example, improving war widows' pensions.

Having invoked the Parliament Act 1911, no less—it had not been used for 40 years—to force the Lords to accept the Bill, the Prime Minister is obviously reluctant to call a halt now. I hope that he will think again, and will come round to agreeing with a former Conservative Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, that a sponge should be drawn across the crimes and horrors of the past, for all the reasons that I have just given.

10.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): I am pleased to respond to the debate. I have noted the presence of not only my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Sir C. Townsend), but my hon. Friends the Members for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg), for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) and for Stevenage (Mr. Wood).

I am sure that it will come as no surprise to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath that I do not find his arguments about the War Crimes Act and its operation either attractive or convincing. My hon. Friend asked how I voted in relation to the measures that the House took. I think that the record will show that I voted in support of the legislation; I hope that that is the case, because that is how I feel.

The House supported the War Crimes Act on a free vote by an overwhelming majority, not only in 1990 but again in 1991. The House was fully aware that the gathering of evidence of alleged war crimes, including evidence from abroad, would be a lengthy and costly process, given that the crimes were committed many years ago; but the House approved the legislation because of the enormity of the crimes, which cannot be diminished by the mere passage of time. The Act is about offences involving the killing of innocent people in horrendous circumstances, contrary to internationally accepted standards of civilised conduct. The House was determined to ensure that people in this country now suspected of such dreadful crimes should not be able to escape justice simply because they did not have British nationality during the second world war.

The Act is now part of the general criminal law and I must make it clear, lest there be any doubt, that the Government remain firmly committed to its purposes. The police and the prosecuting authorities can now follow up evidence that war crimes were committed by non-British nationals during the war, just as they can follow up evidence in other cases of murder and manslaughter, irrespective of the time that has passed or of whether the crimes were committed in Britain. The Act gives effect to the House's intention that persons against whom there is evidence of war crimes committed during the second world war may be brought to trial. There can be no case whatsoever for backtracking on that resolve or affording such people special protection by rendering the Act ineffective or inoperative.

I shall come to the question of investigations and prosecutions in a moment, but first it is worth recalling in a little more detail the background to the Act, what it is about and what the Government's policy on it is. The report of the war crimes inquiry, Command Paper 744, was presented to Parliament in July 1989. The inquiry was conducted, as my hon. Friend said, by Sir Thomas Hetherington and Mr. William Chalmers at the request of the then Home Secretary. The inquiry had been appointed following allegations that persons at that time living in the United Kingdom had committed war crimes during the second world war. The inquiry was asked, inter alia, to obtain and examine relevant material relating to the allegations and to consider, in the light of the likely probative value in court proceedings of the relevant documentary material and the evidence of potential witnesses, whether the law of the United Kingdom should be amended to make it possible to prosecute such persons for war crimes.

The inquiry considered about 300 allegations and concluded that in at least three of them, there would be a realistic prospect of conviction for murder on the evidence available, were the jurisdiction of British courts to be widened so that residents of this country who had committed crimes abroad could be prosecuted, albeit that they were not British at the relevant time. The inquiry recommended that further investigations be made into those cases and into more than 120 other cases. The inquiry noted that little or no consideration had been given by successive British Governments to what might be done with war criminals in the UK for the simple reason that before the inquiry was set up, none had been thought to be in Britain. The inquiry made it clear that nothing in the policy or practice of successive Governments prevented taking action to bring war criminals to justice.

Against the background of the inquiry, and in line with its recommendations, the Government introduced to Parliament in March 1990 what became the War Crimes Act 1991. The purpose of the war crimes legislation was to give our courts jurisdiction over murder, manslaughter

and culpable homicide committed as violations of the laws and customs of war during the second world war in Germany or German-held territory by people who are now British citizens or resident in the UK, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, irrespective of their nationality at the material time.

It is now therefore possible to prosecute for war crimes committed in Europe people who did not have British nationality at the time of the alleged offences. I emphasise that because our courts, as has been said, had jurisdiction over murder, manslaughter and culpable homicide committed abroad by British nationals by virtue of section 9 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and section 6(1) of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975, which was a consolidating statute incorporating the corresponding provision in section 29 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1949.

Moreover, our courts already had jurisdiction over grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva conventions, including wilful killing and torture, wherever in the world the offence was committed and whatever the nationality of the offender, by virtue of the Geneva Conventions Act 1957, although that Act did not apply to grave breaches committed before it came into effect. The War Crimes Act did not therefore introduce any new principle concerning prosecuting for offences abroad irrespective of the nationality of the suspect.

I emphasise that the War Crimes Act did not create any new offences. Violations of the laws and customs of war have long been criminal according to the general principles of law recognised by this country and all other members of the community of civilised nations. The Act did not therefore criminalise conduct that was not already criminal by internationally recognised standards; it ensured that such conduct was triable by our courts.

The War Crimes Bill was approved by this House on a free vote by a large majority—273 votes to 60. It was then denied a Second Reading in another place, by 207 votes to 74. That was in June 1990. The Government reintroduced the Bill in identical form in this House in March 1991, where it was again approved by a large majority on a free vote, by 254 votes to 88. It was subsequently again denied a Second Reading in another place, by 131 votes to 109. The Bill was subsequently enacted, in May 1991, through the operation of the Parliament Acts 1911 and 1949.

I do not need to go into the detail of the debates on the Bill. Many of the arguments were anticipated by the war crimes inquiry. In particular, the inquiry had taken into account the ages of the alleged perpetrators of war crimes and the fact that the people involved had been living here for some considerable time. The inquiry was also aware of the additional manpower and resources that would be involved in investigating the allegations, and of the difficulties of bringing evidence before the courts. However, the inquiry said that those arguments were lacking when weighed in the balance against the alleged atrocities. The inquiry concluded:

"The crimes committed are so monstrous that they cannot be condoned: their prosecution could act as a deterrent to others in future wars. To take no action would taint the United Kingdom with the slur of being a haven for war criminals . . . Financial constraints should not be allowed to obstruct the course of justice in relation to such serious charges".

The fact is that the War Crimes Act is now law. It came into effect in May 1991 and since then the police and prosecuting authorities have had clear responsibilities to investigate and prosecute for war crimes, as appropriate, in the same way as with other allegations of murder and manslaughter. The Government's policy in relation to the Act is unequivocal. It is that those who committed the most terrible crimes in Nazi-occupied Europe during the second world war should not be allowed to use the privilege of residence in this country to escape justice.

I must emphasise that the Hetherington-Chalmers inquiry was just that—an inquiry. It was not a criminal investigation. The investigations did not begin until the Act came into force. Inevitably, the investigations were going to take some time and be resource-intensive. As I have said, the inquiry recommended that investigations be undertaken in more than 120 cases. After the inquiry, the police received information about other cases which also required investigation. The investigations were also going to take time and be costly because the events concerned took place abroad, moreover a long time ago. All of this was, of course, known to the House during the passage of the War Crimes Act. In line with the House's expectations, the Government ensured that the police were appropriately resourced for what were likely to be difficult and protracted inquiries.

Since May 1991, the Metropolitan police war crimes unit has considered 376 cases. In 117 of those, the subject of the inquiries has been confirmed dead. In a further 253 cases, the evidence so far is insufficient for the purposes of prosecution and the Crown Prosecution Service and the police have agreed that no further action should be taken at this time. This is subject to the possibility of reopening cases should any further evidence come to light.

That leaves six cases, of which five are still under active consideration and investigation by the Crown Prosecution Service. They relate to allegations of murder or mass murder of Jewish and Soviet civilians in Belarus and Ukraine by persons who are now living in this country. In the remaining case, the defendant has been found by a jury to be unfit to stand trial. In order to bring the proceedings to an end, the Attorney-General entered a nolle prosequi.

Although the work load of the war crimes unit has inevitably fallen from its peak, because 376 cases have already been considered, the unit is still involved in investigating the five active cases that I have mentioned. In the past six months, members of the unit have made at least six visits to eastern Europe for the purposes of the investigations. Only last week, a member of the unit, accompanied by a CPS lawyer, returned from a visit to Belarus. So a number of chilling crimes which allegedly were committed during the war are still being thoroughly investigated.

Sir Cyril Townsend: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Kirkhope: No, I will not. I am sorry; I have only a minute left.

We cannot be sure that when the five active cases have been completed, that will be the end of the investigations. There have been no new allegations for a year, but it is always possible that fresh allegations will be made or fresh evidence may emerge. It is also possible that war criminals will come to this country. In Canada,

[Mr. Kirkhope]

64 suspects have been identified and they may be deported. If that occurs, it is possible that some of them may arrive in Britain as the last country of embarkation. The war crimes unit is closely monitoring the situation in consultation with the Canadian authorities.

I cannot comment on whether any further prosecutions are imminent or likely. That is a matter for the independent decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Attorney-General.

The cost of investigations to the end of 1996 totals approximately £6 million for the Metropolitan police and approximately £2 million for the CPS. The expected cost of investigations for 1996–97 is about £630,000. Home Office special funding for the war crimes unit stopped in 1995, but the Metropolitan police will receive a total of £1.7 billion in 1997–98 for all their policing needs, including war crimes investigations.

A time bar on investigating and prosecuting war crimes raises a most important, indeed fundamental, point of principle. The fact is that in the United Kingdom we do not have a statutory time bar for laying charges of murder, manslaughter or culpable homicide and this applies no less where such acts are committed as war crimes. To depart from this policy, making war crimes a special case, would be to set a most extraordinary precedent. I do not share my hon. Friend's concerns.

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 6 March 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

SOUTHAMPTON INTERNATIONAL BOAT SHOW BILL

Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cattle Cull

1. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of cattle to be slaughtered in Berkshire during the selective cull. [17545]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): It is not possible to give an estimate of the number of cattle to be culled on a county-by-county basis.

Mr. Rendel: Is the Minister aware that because of the indecision and dithering over the cull, some farmers are now likely to go over quota this year, because they simply do not yet know how many of their cattle are likely to be culled—and even when the numbers are known, the valuations have not yet been done? Will the Minister provide compensation for those who go over quota?

Mr. Baldry: I find that a surprising question, because when the National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association asked us to get on with the selective cull, they knew full well the situation as regards milk quota. Farmers have managed to organise milk quota year on year for many years, and if anything, quite recently we tended to be under quota. Of all the many questions that arise from the selective cull, that is not one that I see as a real issue.

Sir John Cope: Does my hon. Friend agree that the total number of cattle to be slaughtered under the cull has been vastly exaggerated, especially by Liberal Democrat spokesmen, and is unlikely to rise above 100,000?

Mr. Baldry: One of the characteristics of the whole bovine spongiform encephalopathy debacle has been a gross over-dramatisation of the situation by all the Opposition parties, not least the Liberal Democrats. In fact, less than 5 per cent. of the national dairy herd is likely to be affected by the selective cull—a maximum of 100,000 animals. Even that estimate makes assumptions about all the animals that are traceable, and about a full uptake of animals born in the voluntary year. Some of the suggestions that we have heard—from the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), for example—to the effect that one third of the dairy herd will be affected by the cull, are simply ludicrous.

Fishing

2. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the level of United Kingdom fishing relative to current multi-annual guidance programme targets; and what proposals he has to achieve those targets. [17546]

Mr. Baldry: Definitive figures for United Kingdom performance are under discussion with the Commission. Once the Commission agrees figures for the United Kingdom performance, I expect us to be within a handful of points of our targets for the end of December 1996.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful for that totally obscure reply. Will the Minister undertake to argue that the level of cuts likely to be demanded of the British fleet is totally unacceptable? Will he undertake to build a blocking minority against MAGP No. 4, which should not be considered until Europe has accepted our proposals to do something about the quota hoppers who now make up about one fifth of the British fleet? Will he further undertake to reject the Commission's latest proposals, which are dominated by Dutch self-interest in an unacceptable way, especially in the light of the huge Dutch fishing overshoot? Will he undertake to ensure that something is done about industrial fishing, and oppose the proposed days-at-sea limit and the proposed 30 per cent. cut to be imposed on us?

Dr. Godman: Good speech.

Mr. Baldry: It was a good speech—and the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) is even wearing a sober tie.

I do not think that there is much difference between the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and me on the issue. We have made it clear that we will not contemplate any further reduction in the United Kingdom fishing fleet until the issue of quota hoppers is dealt with. What the hon. Gentleman described as my opaque answer meant that we are almost up to our target for MAGP No. 3—we are practically where we should be on that—and we are saying that the United Kingdom does not intend to move forward on No. 4 or to do anything else with it, until the issue of quota hopping is resolved. As the Prime Minister has made clear on several occasions, that is a priority that we seek to achieve at the intergovernmental conference. I hope that everyone on the Opposition Benches will also signal that it is the clear intention of the whole House to ensure that Britain achieves a result on quota hopping at the IGC.

Mr. John Greenway: Do the guidance targets contain anything about the size of lobsters landed off the north-east Yorkshire coast? Is my hon. Friend aware of a proposal to increase the minimum size landed at Filey

from 85 mm to 87 mm? That does not sound much, but it would decimate what little fishing there is left in Filey. Will my hon. Friend promise to look into that?

Mr. Baldry: That is a bit broad for a question on decommissioning, but I shall certainly look into the issue of lobsters in Filey and, if necessary, I would more than welcome a visit to my hon. Friend's constituency.

Food Labelling

3. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department is taking to ensure that food labelling is comprehensible to the public. [17547]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): The law requires that mandatory information on food labels should be easy to understand and that all other information should be true and not misleading. We regularly consult consumer and other organisations and we commission surveys to identify where label information could be improved.

Mr. Hughes: I accept what the Minister says about consulting regularly. Will she look at the report produced last week by the National Consumer Council, which agrees with my view that most food labelling is twaddle, merely giving a list of chemicals, or Latin, or words that nobody understands? There is regulation for descriptions of nutrition—a claim that a food is low fat, for example, has to be regulated—but anybody can put "gives you a healthy diet" on a product, because health matters are not regulated. Can we start again and produce food labels that ordinary people such as me can understand when we go to Tesco?

Mrs. Browning: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall study the report with great care. The Food Advisory Committee is also looking at nutritional and health claims, particularly the latter. The issue can be confusing. The Ministry produces some literature to guide people through it. I agree that labelling must be clear and accurate.

Sir Cranley Onslow: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that everything possible is being done at national and European level to provide adequate warning for those susceptible to allergies, such as that caused by peanuts, that can have fatal consequences?

Mrs. Browning: I assure my hon. Friend that we have pressed the European Commission to propose changes to labelling to help those who suffer from peanut allergies and similar conditions. I am also working on a programme for this year to put more information into the public domain, particularly for food processors. Many people find that there is more labelling for products that obviously contain nuts, but the processed nut is often not immediately obvious. That is the potential danger for people with such allergies.

Organic Products

4. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his Department is doing to encourage the production and marketing of organic products. [17548]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr. Tim Boswell): As well as aid for conversion to organic production, we provide free advisory services and fund the United Kingdom register of organic food standards, together with substantial organic research and development programmes and around £1 million of marketing grants to date to a range of organic interests.

Mr. Banks: The Minister's reply is complacent. Instead of allowing people to be poisoned with stinking meat and pesticides, why do we not do more to encourage the growth of organic products? Is the Minister aware that 70 per cent. of the organic food eaten in this country is imported? We are at the bottom of the European Union league on the organic aid scheme, spending less than half the European Union average. What do the Government have against organic food? Why are they so prejudiced against it? Are they prepared to let people be poisoned by rotten stinking food when they could have healthy organic food?

Mr. Boswell: It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman spoils a good case with which I have some sympathy with hyperbole with which I have no sympathy. He cannot rightly assert that the food offered in this country, organic or otherwise, is rotten and stinking. If it were, it would not be permitted. The Government wish to encourage the production, the marketing and the consumption of organic food for those who want it. To that end, in addition to the measures that I referred to a moment ago, I have participated in a seminar held by our market task force on encouraging greater awareness of the market possibilities—an important incentive for the organic sector.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is the marketing of British produce, organic and otherwise, that is extremely important and which the Ministry does support and should support? On organic produce, does he also agree that it is up to consumers to decide what they want to buy and eat?

Mr. Boswell: I could not agree more. I can tell my hon. Friend that within the sector challenge scheme, which has been set up recently, two of the strong contenders going forward for final consideration are for organic marketing aid improvement schemes.

Mr. William Ross: Does the Minister recall that for at least the first half of this century most food was produced with a low level of artificial fertilisers and practically no sprays and that the farming community, encouraged by Governments of all shades, went over to high production through the use of modern fertilisers? Will the Minister give an assurance that, if we are to move back to organic food production, not only profit levels but food production levels will be maintained in this nation?

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman makes some fair points. I just about remember the first half of this century

when I was a lad, when there was a much lower level of inputs in farm production. The use of science to continue to produce safe food but to a greater intensity has expanded production. More extensive use of the organic sector would curtail production and we need to have all those factors in mind. The relevant points are to offer consumers choice and opportunity so that they can decide what they wish to consume, and ideally, that the British farmer should be able to produce it for them.

Common Agricultural Policy

5. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has made to the European Commission on the reform of the common agricultural policy to accommodate the agricultural interests of those countries which have applied to join the EU. [17549]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I have regular and frequent contacts with the European Commission and other member states on reforming the common agricultural policy. We have consistently argued that early decisions leading to a more market-oriented CAP are essential to facilitate EU enlargement.

Mr. Wilkinson: My right hon. and learned Friend should represent urgently to Commissioner Fischler for the completion by July of the agricultural review of the common agricultural policy which the Commission is undertaking. It is essential that we move to a system of national support and away from European Union-wide support since the CAP is costing the average family in this country £26 per week in additional taxes and food costs. To do so would be compatible with the entry of the applicant countries to the EU. To maintain EU-wide support in the event of their entry would cost an inordinately large amount.

Mr. Hogg: That is an important point. I am not in favour of the repatriation of the common agricultural policy, but I agree that there is scope for much more subsidiarity than there is now. I also agree with the point underlining my hon. Friend's question, which is that the European Union really has to address the question of reform speedily and preferably before the negotiations on enlargement begin.

Mrs. Golding: What proposals is the Minister making to reduce the burden on the British people caused by the unfairness of the common agricultural policy? Does he realise that the reason why his Government have made so little progress is that they are as unpopular and distrusted abroad as they are at home?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Lady misunderstands the position. Within the Agriculture Council there is no enthusiasm for reform of the CAP. In truth, I think only Sweden, the Danes, to some extent the Dutch, ourselves and the Commissioner are in favour of fundamental reform, otherwise there is substantial opposition. It is because of that substantial opposition that we are not making more rapid movement towards reform.

Mr. Rowe: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that one of the reasons why the common agricultural policy is somewhat distrusted is that there is no faith in the inspections that are carried out nationally, and that as part of the reform of the CAP it would be a good idea for international teams of inspectors to go up farm paths and ensure that the rules are being observed as scrupulously in one country as in another?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes an important point, in the sense that there is no doubt that the United Kingdom generally enforces European law, regulations and directives more robustly than many other countries. There is certainly scope for trying, through the Commission and its inspection agencies, to tighten the workings of the common agricultural policy. We, in the context of BSE, for example, have been pleased to welcome many inspection visits from the European Commission and member states.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

6. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he now forecasts, on the basis of existing policies, the last new case of BSE in Britain to occur. [17550]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In August, an independent team lead by Professor Roy Anderson confirmed that BSE was in sharp decline and would virtually die out in the United Kingdom around 2001 as a result of measures already in force. It is not, however, possible to predict precisely when the BSE epidemic will be over.

Mr. Cousins: Does the Minister accept that that prediction was made on the basis of applying to BSE in cows a statistical model derived from the spread of AIDS in humans, and that it must in any event be subject to an extremely wide margin of error? Would not he be wise to add those cautions every time that the prediction is mentioned, to avoid damaging yet further Britain's agricultural industry?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is right in the sense that all predictions are somewhat uncertain. He will find that in my various statements I have tended to use the phrase, "in 2001 or thereabouts", because it is perfectly true that there is likely to be a tail beyond 2001 and we do not know how thick that tail will be. The disease is declining by 40 per cent. year on year and we expect that in all substantial respects it will die out around 2001 or thereabouts, but of course I agree that there must be caveats and provisos.

Mr. Alexander: Will my right hon. and learned Friend comment on a statement that I received today from Mr. Douglas Gascoine of Newark livestock market, of which I hope that I just succeeded in giving him notice, to the effect that, while the European Union has banned our meat, Germany is exporting to us meat from cows more than 30 months old, with the cord attached and including the specified offal? Given the fact that our meat is banned on health grounds, what action can the Ministry take to ensure that those countries that ban our meat do not export to us the very agents that caused BSE in the first place?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I am grateful to him for his courtesy in giving me

prior notice of what he wanted to ask. He has identified a serious matter. I have frequently said in the House that British beef is the safest and best in Europe, and I believe that to be true; one of the reasons for that is that we have in place a range of measures—abattoir control measures, controls on feedstuffs and the over-30-months rule—that are not to be found universally in the European Union.

We want the European Union to accept, for example, the abattoir controls on specified offal that we have in place. That would meet my hon. Friend's point, and I regret that the Council did not accept it in December. I very much hope that the Commissioner will make such proposals again in a month or so; if so, we shall support them.

Dr. Strang: May I remind the Minister that measures to keep the BSE agent out of our cattle feed were put in place in 1988? Is he aware that the head of his Ministry's beef and sheep division stated that because of the lax controls it was not until August 1996 that we could be certain that contaminated feed was no longer reaching our cattle? Does he agree that as a result of the Government's failure to enforce the measures many more cattle will die of BSE, the dreadful epidemic will last longer and the taxpayer will have to pay a beef tax of £3.5 billion?

Mr. Hogg: Professor Anderson's report, of which the hon. Gentleman knows, identified 1994 as the date when, in all probability, contaminated feedstuffs were no longer available in substantial quantities to cattle. It is true that from August last year, we made it a criminal offence to possess meat and bone meal on farms. Looking back with hindsight, there are probably a number of things that we could have done between 1988 and 1995 that we did not do, but at all times we acted in accordance with the best advice and tried to make judgments that were both reasonable and proportionate on the basis of the information then available. I do not accept the criticism, but I accept the facts to which I referred.

Common Fisheries Policy

7. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the Fisheries Ministers from other member states of the European Union to discuss matters relating to the reform of the common fisheries policy. [17551]

Mr. Baldry: At the December Fisheries Council, we discussed a number of matters relating to the reform of the common fisheries policy.

Dr. Godman: The severe restriction of industrial fishing is a long-overdue reform. An outright ban is perhaps impossible. In any case, we can continue fishing grenadier and blue whiting. Does the Minister agree that pout and sprat fishing should be banned completely? When he goes to Bergen, will he argue for a restricted total allowable catch of sand eels in grounds such as the Wee Bankie and Buckie Man's bank?

Mr. Baldry: I have made my views on industrial fishing known in the House on many occasions. We have had many discussions with the fishing industry and I am pleased that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and others recognise that we need to move beyond a precautionary quota for sand eels to an actual quota in areas such as Wee Bankie. Ministers will certainly propose that at the forthcoming Bergen conference. The evidence of the impact of industrial fishing is such that we need to ensure that it is not destroying the fish chain upon which so many fishermen, both north and south of the border, depend.

Mr. Ian Bruce: My hon. Friend knows that much of the pressure on the common fisheries policy results from people's worries about cheating on quotas. What have Ministers been able to do to secure enforcement of quotas by other countries? Has he anything to say about British fishermen cheating on quotas?

Mr. Baldry: It is unacceptable if other member states do not apply the rules as rigorously as we do. At our behest, the Commission has been very active in ensuring that we have a Community inspectorate of member states' fisheries that seeks to ensure that the rules are applied as rigorously by other member states as they are by us. We will continue to seek to ensure that the Commission enforces those regulations throughout the European Community; otherwise, a mockery is made of having a common fisheries policy.

Mr. Morley: On reform of the CFP, I want to return to quota hopping. The Minister said that it will be pursued vigorously at the intergovernmental conference and we support that approach. However, many quota hoppers have legally bought their licences from UK fishermen as part of the free market approach that the Government have supported. Will the Minister support attaching conditions to licences? That might make things more difficult for overseas buyers and make it more attractive to maintain licences in regional fisheries.

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman misses the point. Our difficulty is that the European Court of Justice has deemed that under the treaty and present law, we cannot do that. *[Interruption.]* No, we cannot do it. The European Court paid far too much attention to the idea of a single market and freedom of association, and failed to take sufficient account of national fishing quotas. That is why we must ensure that there are treaty changes. I welcome the cross-party support for securing that at the IGC. That is the only way that we can be confident of eliminating quota hoppers once and for all.

Beef Ban

8. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department is taking to bring about the lifting of the EU ban on British beef. [17552]

9. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress towards the lifting of the beef exporting ban. [17554]

12. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy on the ban by European member states on British beef. [17557]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 25 February I wrote to Commissioners Fischler and Bonino explaining how the

United Kingdom has fulfilled the preconditions laid down under the Florence agreement and I submitted our proposals for a United Kingdom export certified herds scheme, together with a paper setting out its scientific basis. The scheme would be the first step in lifting the export ban. I pressed for urgent and constructive discussion of our proposals at the relevant committees.

Mr. Arnold: My right hon. and learned Friend will know that the beef rearing industries in Latin America have relied for many decades on obtaining the best breeding stock in the world from Britain. As they have had to rely all this time on second best, and as we have complied with the five principal conditions of Florence, is it not high time that this disgraceful and unfair ban was lifted?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right. There are perhaps two points worth making. Of course we are against the generality of the ban, for all the reasons that I and my right hon. and hon. Friends have expressed from the Dispatch Box, but there is a particular wrongness about exports to third countries. That is what my hon. Friend is highlighting. I could not agree more.

Mr. Jessel: Is it not ridiculous for the European Commission in Brussels to imply that British beef is safe for British people, but dangerous for people in every other country in the world? The ban upsets the livelihood of our farmers and is costing our taxpayers £3 billion. As the policy was welcomed by the shadow Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), is not the moral that we should have as little to do with either the hon. Gentleman or the European Commission in Brussels?

Mr. Hogg: I do not think that I would want to be quite so unkind as my hon. Friend, but there is a lot of substance in what he says. He makes two important points. One is the enormous cost of this business—£3.5 billion committed over three years, which is powerful testimony to the importance that a Conservative Government attach to British agriculture. When we debated the matter some 10 days ago, it was plain that the Labour party would never have invested that amount of money in support of British agriculture.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Minister aware that, no matter how much faith British housewives have in British produce, if there is even the slightest suggestion that his Ministry is continuing to obscure basic reports that affect the hygiene of British products, far from protecting our farming community or anyone else, he will constantly undermine the quality of our exports anywhere in the world?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Lady would be right if what she said was true. There will be a statement after questions, with your permission, Madam Speaker. I shall deal more specifically with the point that the hon. Lady has raised. Our policy throughout the BSE crisis, both before and after 20 March last year, has been to be wholly open and candid with the public and the House, for the kind of reason that the hon. Lady has just identified.

Mr. Pike: As the Minister is in a conciliatory mood today, does he accept that it is not the National Farmers Union's change of policy but the Government's delay in implementing what they agreed at Florence that has meant that an end to the beef ban is still not in sight?

Mr. Hogg: I have never blamed the NFU for changing its position. There is no doubt that the selective cull is a serious interference with other people's property or that the cull is extraordinarily difficult to justify in any scientific or objective way. Its only justification is that if we do not do it, we will not get any progress in lifting the ban. The NFU did not want a selective cull. I understand that. I do not criticise it for that. That was its position for much of the summer. It was only well into the autumn that the NFU came to adopt the position that it now does. I am not critical of it; I am merely describing the facts.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that I am proud to be wearing my NFU tie at questions today? It was presented to me by farmers on Friday night after a very good beef dinner in my constituency. Does he accept that they told me that they want the European ban lifted as quickly as possible and that they see it as nothing more than politics? They also want to see some fast food joints—if I can use that description—lift the British beef ban. They believe that fast food stores such as McDonald's could show a clear lead if they started selling British beef again.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is a splendid example of how good British beef can be for one. He has a serious point: it is extremely regrettable that a number of major restaurant chains and also public authorities, for a variety of reasons—none of them good in science—have been reluctant to sell British beef. That is nonsense because all beef products of every kind that are sold in the United Kingdom from British beef must satisfy the most stringent tests. In terms of quality or safety, there is no distinction of any kind to be drawn between a British beefburger and a British steak. Both are of the highest quality and of total safety.

Dr. Strang: May I remind the Minister that it was the Prime Minister who told the House of Commons that all the conditions would be met for the beef ban to be lifted by November last year, and that the lifting of that ban was in the Government's hands? May I remind him that no part of that ban has been lifted and that the Government dithered and delayed over the implementation of the Florence agreement? Is it not clear that the Government must accept responsibility for the delay in lifting the beef ban?

Mr. Hogg: We have complied with the five preconditions set out in the Florence agreement. We have discharged our part of the bargain and we have every reason to expect the Europeans to discharge theirs. They now have an opportunity to do so because they are in possession of our export-certified herd scheme proposals.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that when farmers in Teignbridge try to make up their minds whether the Labour party has anything to offer them in terms of farming policy, they would do well to remember that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) approved the imposition of the ban in the first place? Can my right hon. and learned Friend also tell

me what I should say to farmers in Teignbridge when they witness how their businesses have been devastated by the imposition of the ban, while we are still apparently either unwilling or unable to stop the importation of foreign meat products which have not been produced to the same safety standards as our own?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which is similar to that made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander). There is no doubt that we need to get in Europe a comprehensive regime to govern cattle feed rations and the removal of offal; we should also introduce a 30-month rule.

On the first part of my hon. Friend's question, he is right that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang)—not just once, but on at least two separate occasions and possibly more—defended the imposition of the ban and expressed the hope that we would have done the same had we been in the position of the French. Should the hon. Gentleman ever be in a position to try to ask for the ban to be lifted, he will be in some difficulty because the French will merely quote his words back to him.

Quota Hopping

10. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has recently held with his counterparts in Europe to discuss quota hopping; and what recommendations he will make to the Amsterdam EU summit. [17555]

Mr. Baldry: We have tabled a proposal in the intergovernmental conference to tackle quota hopping. We take every opportunity to make clear to fellow European Community Ministers the need to find an effective and permanent solution to quota hopping. We shall, of course, do so again at the Amsterdam summit.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the Minister understand that there is a desperate need to have collective discussions within the Fisheries Council, because he earlier mentioned the possibility of treaty changes? Is he actually saying that amendments will be made to the treaty as a result of any representations made by the Government? Will he assure us that there will be a meeting between the United Kingdom Government, the Dutch presidency and the Spaniards to resolve the issue so that we can reach an IGC conclusion?

Mr. Baldry: I think that we have kept the House fairly well informed on what we are doing. Some time ago, we tabled an amended protocol to the treaty. Those treaty changes will be part of the IGC negotiations; they are not something that is necessarily within the competence of the Fisheries Council. It is something to be determined within the IGC. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear on a number of occasions that one of our clear negotiating objectives at the IGC is to achieve the elimination of quota hoppers once and for all.

Mr. Gallie: Difficult though discussions on fishing are in Europe, have there not been some successes for British fishermen, and would not Britain's strong voice on these issues diminish to a Scottish whimper if the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and her colleagues got their way?

Mr. Baldry: It is a self-evident truth on this issue, as on practically everything else, that we are stronger as a United Kingdom than we would be if we were sundered and severed into various parts. There have been successes for the UK fishing industry and we achieved a number of successes at the December Fisheries Council. Only recently, the Commission announced that it had agreed to our proposals for regional committees to investigate fishing and the first of these will be set up in relation to the North sea. For the first time, that will give real fishermen a voice in what happens in the common fisheries policy and it is this Government who have achieved that for fishermen, not only in the UK, but throughout the whole of Europe.

Beef Ban

11. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the cost to the United Kingdom to date of the European beef ban on United Kingdom exports; and if he will make a statement. [17556]

Mrs. Browning: The UK beef market has been affected by the European Union ban on exports of beef, together with a fall in beef consumption. Since 1 April 1996 the overall cost of the BSE eradication and compensation schemes amounts to £949 million. Forecast expenditure on BSE-related measures in 1997-98 and 1998-99 is £1,010 million and £580 million respectively.

Mr. Cox: Is the hon. Lady aware that the figures that she has given are for ever on the increase? That is a clear indication of the total incompetence with which the Government have handled this issue. We have suffered the loss of the European beef market and the cost of the slaughter of cattle; yet despite all the promises and all the talk, there is—as we heard in earlier exchanges—no prospect of the beef ban being lifted. Where do the British agriculture industry and beef industry go from here? What further costs are we to bear?

Mrs. Browning: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not hear me correctly: £580 million is clearly less, not more, than £1,010 million and therefore the figures are on a declining scale, year on year. There is a commitment to the industry and to the related parts of the industry chain that we will ensure their future by putting public money behind them. It is a matter of regret that the hon. Gentleman and his party do not consider the industry important enough to support its future in that way.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend think that the beef crisis was helped or exacerbated by the shadow Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), asking whether it was true that members of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee were not feeding British beef to their children and grandchildren?

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and his colleague the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) played an important role at the beginning of the crisis. However, their attempts to thwart the beef industry have not succeeded and I am pleased to say that many retailers are reporting that domestic beef sales are higher than they were before March last year, despite the actions of the Opposition.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I have a straight answer, without the usual ministerial wriggles? Is it not true that,

if Labour's policy in 1990 of an animal identification system had been in place, there would have been no cull, the taxpayer in this country would have been millions of pounds better off and the BSE crisis would have already ended?

Mrs. Browning: No—the hon. Gentleman is trying to rewrite history, as is his custom. Of course we want to have traceability and animal identification—that is an important part of transparency in the industry—but to suggest that those methods could have rewritten history in respect of contaminated feed is wrong.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

13. **Sir Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the trend of reported BSE cases in the last three years. [17558]

Mrs. Browning: The number of suspects being reported reached a peak of more than 1,000 cases a week in 1993, fell to about 800 in 1994 and is now about 120 a week and still falling.

Sir Colin Shepherd: I thank my hon. Friend for that very encouraging report to the House. Is it not precisely because of the robust and tough action taken by the Government that outbreaks of BSE in this country, measured in terms of the number of reported cases, are decreasing—not increasing, as they are in the remainder of the European Union? While my hon. Friend is considering that, will she reflect on the fact that throughout the entire BSE crisis the Labour party has not made a single constructive proposal?

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is clear from the way in which the figures are coming down—a 40 per cent. reduction year on year—that the Government's policy of dealing with contaminated feed and dealing with this disease has been absolutely right. Of course there is more to be done, but there are encouraging signs that the disease is now on the wane.

Mr. Jamieson: Can the Minister explain to the House why the Secretary of State for Defence stated in a written answer to me recently that Her Majesty's armed forces eat mainly foreign beef and not British beef?

Mrs. Browning: The armed forces do eat a good proportion of British beef. However, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has given me a great deal of information to enable me to take out to the British suppliers the figures on which the armed forces buy their beef to discover whether those figures can be matched competitively, and I regret to say that they cannot. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says, "Ah!" so presumably competitive tendering is not part of the Labour party's policy any more: old Labour, new Labour—they still believe in centralisation.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 March. [17575]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Coombs: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the "basic pensions plus" proposals announced yesterday not only guarantee the value of the state pension, but offer the prospect of a much improved pension with a value of as much as £175 per week to a person on average earnings? Does that not contrast starkly with the Labour party's plan to cut the value of the state pension by £20 per week?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the impact of the proposals that I announced with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security yesterday. Those proposals will guarantee that everyone, whether in the new scheme or out of it, will continue to receive at least the basic state pension, increasing in line with inflation. I think that the response that we have heard from some quarters—including some, although not all, Labour Members—shows that those people do not understand what is proposed. *[Interruption.]* A moment ago, the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) asked, "What is this point about £20 being cut off the state pension under Labour's plans?" Perhaps she should consult the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), who said in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security that she anticipated a lower level of basic state pension, to compensate for reducing the retirement age to 60. That cut, unless there is more expenditure—which the shadow Chancellor says that he would not allow—would be the equivalent of £20 per week.

Mrs. Golding *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: There is no point in the hon. Lady shaking her head. That is what her hon. Friend has in mind.

Mr. Blair: May I put to the Prime Minister two specific questions arising from the report by Mr. Bill Swann on hygiene in abattoirs? First, why was that report not published on 31 March 1996, as Mr. Swann was told that it would be? Secondly, why did Ministers not see the report and act on it?

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Gentleman's questions, as he will discover when he hears the statement a little later, are based—*[Interruption.]* I am assuming that, in view of the right hon. Gentleman's interest, he will be here for the statement; I am making an assumption. The right hon. Gentleman's questions are based on what he supposes is in a report which, I believe, he has not read.

There is no suggestion of the report being suppressed. It was produced by officials. It was drawn up by the Meat Hygiene Service. It was very widely circulated. It was circulated around the trade and elsewhere. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry that somebody did not receive it. Ministers did not receive it—that is true. It was a working document. *[Interruption.]* This is exactly the point. The report was drawn up for the Meat Hygiene Service as part of its

work to ensure the highest standards of hygiene in slaughterhouses. It is a routine report, of which there are many, not normally shown to Ministers and not shown to Ministers on this occasion, but circulated to the people who had an operational need to know about it.

Mr. Blair: That is the most extraordinary explanation. This is Mr. Swann's report. I have read it. It is 54 pages long and contains 81 recommendations. May I point out to the Prime Minister that on page 19 the report states that there is a serious concern about contamination, that the contamination may lead to the spread of the E. coli organism and that action should be taken immediately? If the Prime Minister says that the report was not shown to Ministers, I ask him why not. With 54 pages and 81 recommendations, it was sufficiently serious, was it not? Does he not think in retrospect that, given the seriousness of the report, it would have been better if it had been shown to Ministers so that it could have been acted on in the interests of the public?

The Prime Minister: The point that the Labour leader perhaps genuinely does not understand—*[Interruption.]* I have got beyond page 81—a very quick read this morning. I think that the right hon. Gentleman may genuinely not understand, so I shall make the point again. The report was a working document, drawn up for the Meat Hygiene Service and circulated to its staff. The Meat Hygiene Service is implementing the recommendations in the report, as the right hon. Gentleman noted.

This is the way in which such matters have been handled for a very long time—*[Interruption.]* I say to the right hon. Gentleman that there are huge numbers of such working documents every year. If they all came to Ministers for Ministers to read every one, nothing else would be done. The right hon. Gentleman has been in opposition so long that he does not understand that. The report was circulated to the people who needed to take action and I am advised by those people that they have implemented the action.

Mr. Blair: Whether the report should be shown to Ministers must depend on its seriousness. If it is serious, it should be shown to Ministers. May I point out to the Prime Minister that Mr. Swann was told that it would be published precisely because it dealt with serious issues?

The Prime Minister's latest explanation is that the recommendations have been implemented. May I quote to him what Mr. Swann said this morning on the radio? He was asked whether everything that he had recommended had been carried out: answer—no. He was then asked whether some of the recommendations that had not been carried out were important for hygiene and safety: answer—yes.

This is a serious report which reveals serious problems of contamination. We know about the problems with E. coli, but the report was not even shown to Professor Pennington, who is in charge of the E. coli administration. When will someone in the Government take responsibility for the proper and competent administration of our affairs?

The Prime Minister: When will the right hon. Gentleman realise that when he behaves in this fashion, what he does—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry to say that it is true: he exaggerates problems that exist before he has heard the statement, irrespective of the interests of the meat industry, in exactly the way in which the Opposition have behaved on previous occasions. I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that that, in advance of the statement, is the height of irresponsibility.

I repeat for the right hon. Gentleman that the report was provided for the Meat Hygiene Service, which was established to improve safety for the consumer and opposed by the Labour party when we established it. Yet again, the right hon. Gentleman is trying to stir up public concerns that are being dealt with by a public watchdog which he and his colleagues opposed when it was established. His party has stood in the way of every change made to improve hygiene standards. That is absolutely true. If the Opposition had had their way, responsibility for slaughterhouse hygiene would still be in the hands of 300 local councils applying the rules in 300 different ways. The hygiene service is raising standards, and the right hon. Gentleman is raising scares.

Q2. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 March. [17576]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Arnold: Has my right hon. Friend noticed the knowledgeable speech given in the House of Lords yesterday in which it was said that our economy is doing rather well, particularly in comparison to the last 18 years—*[Interruption.]*—and even more so in comparison to the economies of Europe? That speech was by the noble Lord Barnett, the last Chief Secretary to the Treasury in a Labour Government. Did my right hon. Friend note that Lord Barnett said quite clearly that taxes may be increased without increasing the rates? What is more, he said that he expected any future Labour Government to do just that.

The Prime Minister: The noble Lord Barnett, being a life peer and therefore not threatened by the plans of the Leader of the Opposition and the Labour party, has clearly let the cat out of the bag as to what he thinks about Labour's spending plans. As a former Chief Secretary, he knows that they do not add up and that there is a £12 billion black hole in the middle of Labour's plans. He knows that the Labour party cannot sign up to Budget book figures and then disown the policies that would achieve those figures unless it plans to put up taxes, cut expenditure or find some other way of dealing with the great black hole in its plans. It is not, as the shadow Chancellor likes to imply, a Tory scare: we now know the truth as a result of what the last Labour Chief Secretary to the Treasury has said.

Q3. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 March. [17577]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Callaghan: Is the Prime Minister aware of the crisis in the hospitals in the north area of Manchester since

four out of five hospitals were closed by the Government? Is he aware that since Christmas the North Manchester General hospital has accepted only accident and emergency cases, and that two weeks ago eight people remained on trolleys for 23 hours because there were no beds available for them in that hospital or in any other hospital in the region? Is that not a national disgrace and a scandal, and what does the Prime Minister intend to do about it?

The Prime Minister: One thing that I am doing to improve the quality of the health service is promising to provide extra resources for each year of the next Parliament, as we have done for the past 18 years. I notice that there is no comparable pledge from the Labour party. Year after year, we have dramatically increased the resources made available to the health service. We operate policies such as compulsory tendering, which brings more money into the health service, and we have abolished a whole tier of regional government in order to provide extra money for the health service. All those policies were opposed by the Labour party, which will not provide extra resources for the health service.

Mrs. Currie: Did the Prime Minister see today the launch of Europe 97 by the all-party European Movement? Will he join me in welcoming this important effort—which has the backing of the unions, major industries, the Confederation of British Industry and the European Commission—to put the facts about Europe and the benefit of our membership of the European Union to the people of this country rather than the fictions about its dangers?

The Prime Minister: I have not yet seen the document to which my hon. Friend refers, but I will certainly obtain a copy and look forward to reading it. It is important that the important debate on Europe is conducted on the basis of facts, not fiction, and that people fully understand precisely the implications of policies followed across Europe in each individual country and by the Commission and, of course, in our own country.

Lockerbie

Q4. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Clinton the relevance to the Lockerbie inquiry of the publication of the report by the United States Inspector General into laboratory practices and alleged misconduct in explosives–related and other cases. [17578]

The Prime Minister: I understand that the report has not been published. As the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), made clear on 28 February, we understand that there is nothing to suggest that the report will reflect in any way on the Lockerbie case, but if anything relevant emerged from it, the Government would evaluate the implications carefully.

Mr. Dalyell: Against the background set out in that Adjournment debate, have the Government asked the Americans how it is that their forensic expert, James Thurman, has been found to have fabricated forensic evidence? If the Prime Minister asked the Americans, what did they say?

The Prime Minister: Yes, we have made inquiries about that, as the hon. Gentleman may have anticipated. The United States authorities have confirmed that the Federal Bureau of Investigation has transferred Mr. Thurman to other duties while the activities of the FBI laboratories are investigated. However, we are further advised that the case against the two Libyans does not depend in any respect on any evidence that Mr. Thurman may give.

Engagements

Q5. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 March. [17579]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Clark: Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituency has the highest number of home owners in the country, at a fraction under 90 per cent.? As we now have low inflation, low interest rates and very attractive mortgage rates, what advice would he give—as we approach a general election—to my constituents and to home owners throughout the country?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend says, we have stable prices, low mortgage rates and a rapidly improving economic situation that is unmatched anywhere in Europe. The advice that my hon. Friend should give to his constituents is to stick to the policies that have created that and not put it at risk by following policies adopted on the continent which have led to a quite different outcome.

Meat Hygiene Service (Report)

3.32 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members leaving the Chamber please do so quickly and quietly? We have business to conduct here. Minister, when you are ready.

Mr. Hogg: It may be helpful if I make a statement about the report by the Meat Hygiene Service on the state of hygiene in slaughterhouses, which has been the subject of much comment in the press this morning.

The facts are as follows. The Meat Hygiene Service came into existence on 1 April 1995 as a Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food agency, and took over responsibility for enforcement of hygiene rules in slaughterhouses that had previously rested with local authorities.

One of the targets for the agency, approved by Ministers and announced to Parliament, was to carry out a review of the state of hygiene in each individual slaughterhouse in Great Britain. It was required to complete that assessment by the end of March 1996. The purposes were threefold: first, to create a comprehensive benchmarking of standards and practices within the British fresh meat industry; secondly, to allocate resources to a function previously performed by local authorities; and, thirdly, to drive up standards across the board and in individual plants.

The Meat Hygiene Service conducted its review by appointing hygiene advice teams to visit each slaughterhouse in the country to assess its score and make recommendations for improvements: a mark was given to each slaughterhouse to serve as a benchmark against future progress.

The final outcome was a comprehensive assessment of the state of hygiene that had been found and a long list of recommendations for future action. The report in its final form was always intended as an internal working document, to be used by the enforcement authorities, so it was not formally published. However, it was presented to the Meat Industry Forum—the leading representatives of meat industry organisations, with whom the Meat Hygiene Service holds regular discussions—and was the subject of frequent discussions with the industry and others. The fact of the review was also explicitly referred to on page 18 of the annual report on the Meat Hygiene Service's first year of operations, which was presented to Parliament on 17 July 1996, and placed in the Library of the House.

I will deal with some specific criticisms which have been made. Was the report turned down? The facts are as follows. Hygiene assessment teams of MHS staff prepared reports on individual plants. An editorial board, chaired by the MHS head of operations, and made up of professional staff who had all been part of advisory teams, asked Mr. Swann to compile a report on red meat.

Mr. Swann's first draft was regarded as rather unsatisfactory and not fully reflecting the views of others who had taken part in the review. Mr. Swann was asked to recast his contribution, but was not willing to do so. The editorial board then asked another senior member of staff to redraft the section on red meat. The revised and condensed version covering both red meat and poultry was put to the industry representatives last year. The final report reflected the majority judgment of the professional veterinary staff who carried out the review.

It is said that important recommendations were not acted on, but that is untrue. Individual reports were made on specific plants and were discussed with individual operators.

Meat Hygiene Service staff are present in every slaughterhouse. In their continuing discussions, they are in a position to ensure that necessary improvements are carried out. All their work is carried out under the over-arching supervision of the State Veterinary Service.

One specific point of concern is in relation to E. coli—namely that cattle should not be delivered to slaughterhouses in a dirty condition. It is quite clear that concerted action is needed by the enforcement authorities, by slaughterhouse management and by farmers, to ensure that cattle are presented for slaughter in the cleanest possible condition. The MHS has taken action. For example, ante-mortem checks are carried out on all cattle and are being tightened up. Further action is in hand. The MHS is preparing clear visual operational guidance on the standards expected and how to achieve them. It will be issued this month.

Our purpose in creating the MHS—a policy that was bitterly opposed by Opposition parties—was to drive up standards within abattoirs and the slaughtering industry. The preparation of the report and its follow-up is part of that process. Standards are constantly improving, and they are substantially better now than they were when the service was provided, to varying standards, by more than 300 local authorities. That is a tribute to the MHS, and to the Government for insisting on its creation.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Does the Minister accept that, for many years, we have realised how vital it is to have high standards of hygiene in our slaughterhouses, and that, following the discovery of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, it was even more important to achieve those standards because of a possible link with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease?

Does the Minister agree that the report produces alarming evidence showing just how badly the Government enforced the controls in our abattoirs to keep BSE, E. coli and other diseases out of our food? Spinal cords were not being removed, bovine specified offal bins were unmarked, and there was a major problem of faecal contamination, which could infect carcases with E. coli, salmonella and other organisms. The report also draws attention to important worries about animal welfare.

Can the Minister confirm that the report is thorough and substantial, and, indeed, that it cost some £1 million to produce? Can he confirm that it makes 81 major recommendations on abattoir practices? Can he confirm that all those recommendations are now being implemented? Can he assure us that the problems identified by the hygiene advice teams are being addressed? Does he agree with the report about the need for a proper national strategy in relation to contamination in abattoirs? When will that strategy be implemented?

May I point out to the Minister that this final report is dated December 1995? He needs no reminding that it was in March 1996—March last year—that Ministers were

advised of the probability that the new variant of CJD was linked with BSE. Surely, against that background, we had a right to expect that Ministers were leaving no stone unturned to ensure that the highest standards were being implemented in our abattoirs. Surely Ministers had a responsibility to examine the situation assiduously, to ensure that all the regulations were being properly enforced—and it should be remembered that the BSE regulations were introduced as long ago as 1989.

If Ministers were carrying out that proper examination, how could they be unaware of this major report? It is not a routine report; it is not a casual document containing a few minor criticisms. It is a devastating critique of practices in our abattoirs. How was it that Professor Pennington, who has been conducting the inquiry into the tragic outbreak of E. coli in central Scotland, was unaware of the report? Why was it never shown to him? How was it that Richard Cawthorne, a United Kingdom abattoir monitor and owner, and president of the European Meat Association—he was on the radio this morning—did not see the report?

We are advised that the report was due for publication in March 1996, but it was never made public. It really is not good enough for the Minister to say in his statement that there was a reference to this major report, which was completed in March 1995, in a document that came from the Meat Hygiene Service to the House of Commons, and was placed in the Library just as the House rose for the summer recess. He has not answered the question—and his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has not answered the question—why on earth was the report not made public and put in the public domain? How can we be confident that Ministers are acting on these matters if they do not make such reports public?

Why cannot the Government understand that, on food safety matters, we have to be open and up front on everything? Is this matter not further evidence of the need for an independent food standards agency, with food safety as its No. 1 priority? Secrecy only undermines consumer confidence in the safety of our food. Yet again, another episode is leading the public to lose even more confidence in the Government on the subject of the safety of our food.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman did not make the slightest effort to listen to what I said. I shall deal with his general points first, and then his particular points. He said that it is vital that we have proper controls in abattoirs. I entirely agree, and that is why we introduced the Meat Hygiene Service. It is true that, when practices were controlled by local authorities, they were not as good as we would wish. It is regrettable that the hon. Gentleman voted against the establishment of the Meat Hygiene Service, because it is the instrument for a national approach to the problems.

On many occasions, the hon. Gentleman referred to the document prepared by Mr. Swann in December 1995 as the final document. It was not a final report: it was not a report at all. It was a first draft requested by the editorial board, which comprised people who were all—I think—engaged in the assessment that was being carried out.

When the first draft was presented to the editorial board, the members—the professional peers of Mr. Swann—decided that the report was not satisfactory, for the reasons that they advanced, because they had carried out the assessment. They asked him to redraft it. He decided not to do so. I do not blame him, and I am not trying to be critical of any individuals. His peers asked him to revise it, and they thought it needed changing because it was not satisfactory. That he declined to do.

The editorial board then asked another expert, who had already prepared one of the chapters, to do the chapter on red meat. The chapter on red meat represented the considered view of the majority of the veterinary experts engaged in the assessment. That report was extensively circulated around the members of the industry to whom the matter was relevant, because they sat on the Meat Industry Forum. They had copies of the report, and discussed it on many occasions. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary discussed it and related matters on 22 occasions in 14 months.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), if he had wanted to, could have asked for a copy of the report, because it was explicitly referred to on page 18 of the annual report, which he clearly has not read. Before he speaks again on such issues, I suggest that he seriously considers what is said in advance, especially given that he had a copy of my statement in advance.

Sir John Cope (Northavon): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that all the criticisms of hygiene and practices in abattoirs disclosed in the report are, in so far as they are the responsibility of regulators, the responsibility of local authorities, which were the regulators until shortly before the report was compiled? The creation of the Meat Hygiene Service brought the practices under the purview of the national Government, and enabled all the recommendations that my right hon. and learned Friend mentioned to be put into practice to improve the abattoirs, compared to their standards when they were run by the local authorities.

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend is wholly right about that. There is no doubt that the control of abattoirs and slaughterhouses, when it was conducted by local authorities, was not as uniform in its application as one would have wished. The desire for national, uniform standards was the reason why the Government introduced the Meat Hygiene Service, which was wrongly opposed by the Opposition parties. The final condensed report that was given to the industry was part of the process whereby the Meat Hygiene Service assessed the nature of the problem with a view to driving up standards. That is exactly what is happening. That is a positive tribute to the Meat Hygiene Service and to the Government who set it up, and a positive condemnation of those who opposed its setting up.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): First, I sincerely commiserate with the Minister on his injury. Would he like to take this opportunity to dispel the wicked media rumour that he shot himself in the foot?

Does the Minister agree that the central issue is not whether the report was published in full, but whether its trenchant recommendations have been implemented in full? May I refer him to the particular replies given by his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister a few moments ago? He said that the recommendations were drawn to the attention of all those who had an "operational need" to be aware of them. He then went on to say that they were drawn to the attention of all those who "needed to take action".

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

Why, in those circumstances, did Professor Pennington tell us this morning in terms that he was not aware of the report or its recommendations, and that he had no knowledge that there were any recommendations at all which were relevant to his inquiry into the E. coli outbreak?

Mr. Hogg: Professor Pennington has indeed said that he himself did not see the final report. It is, however, clear from our inquiries that the group was aware of the exercise being undertaken by the Meat Hygiene Service.

With regard to the implementation of the recommendations, a number of activities have gone on in parallel. Perhaps the most important is that, when the meat hygiene advice teams visited each plant, they prepared a plant report which was additional to and different from the other documentation that we have been discussing. Each plant report was discussed, where discussion was necessary, with the plant operators, so it formed the basis of an operation plan within that particular plant. A copy was also sent to the regional managers of the Meat Hygiene Service. Therefore, specific plants were dealt with on a plant-by-plant basis as a result of the assessment.

More general lessons were also learned, and discussed with the industry through the forum, which had the final report in front of it and discussed it on many occasions. Hon. Members have been asking for a national policy to ensure that clean livestock enters abattoirs. That is why we set up the Meat Hygiene Service. It has insisted on that policy through its in-plant controls. This general document, which will be attached to the operators' manual, will be published shortly, and will add to the documentation available.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Has my right hon. and learned Friend thought about the policy of transporting animals substantial distances to the larger abattoirs, which means that they often arrive much dirtier than when they went to the little local abattoir, when the farmer had already hosed them down? Will he consider the policy of closing all our small abattoirs, because at least outbreaks there do not travel over such a wide geographical area?

Mr. Hogg: I am afraid that I cannot entirely agree with my hon. Friend, because part of the policy of driving up standards in this area has been to ensure that abattoirs and slaughterhouses comply with the rules, and a number of those to which my hon. Friend refers did not comply with the rules, and that is why they were closed down. They did not provide the kind of standards that the Meat Hygiene Service wished to see in our abattoirs and slaughterhouses.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Does the Minister understand that there is a difference between Professor Pennington's team knowing that the work was going on—

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Madam Speaker: Order. The Minister has my permission to stand at the Dispatch Box. I hope that he will not be kept there too long, and that questions will be short and to the point. I know that he will give short answers.

Dr. Bray: Is the Minister aware that there is a difference between Professor Pennington's team knowing that the work was going on, and his being sent a copy of the final report and recommendations? Is he further aware that Dr. Ahmed, the consultant in public health medicine in charge of the outbreak control team dealing with the E. coli outbreak in my constituency, has widely been giving the advice that it must be assumed that 20 per cent. of the fresh beef sold in Scotland today is contaminated with E. coli? What action has been taken on the report?

Mr. Hogg: It is for the chairman of any inquiry or review team to determine the evidence that the team wants to receive. It is for him to determine the lines of inquiry that he wishes to pursue. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has always been ready to provide any information, evidence or material to the group. Indeed, I think that a specific offer was made by the veterinary service. Moreover, a member of the ownership group of the Meat Hygiene Service is on the Pennington group, so it is clear that the group was perfectly well aware of what was going on—the report and the fact of the review. It is for Professor Pennington to call for material that he deems relevant to his inquiry, and we would be happy to respond.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Is not the issue at stake the following: it is extremely unlikely that, had we not created the Meat Hygiene Service, a report of that nature could ever have been prepared, because there was no mechanism at a national level for local authority-supervised abattoirs to be required to carry out such hygiene checks? As for independence, can the Minister assure me that all meat hygiene inspectors are qualified veterinary surgeons, and are being properly briefed on what needs to be done to ensure that there is no outbreak of E. coli in any of our local abattoirs, where none has taken place thus far?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend has made a serious point. When the controls were administered by 300 local authorities, before the creation of the Meat Hygiene Service, it was not possible to have an overview of what was happening in slaughterhouses—and, a fortiori, it was not possible to have a national policy to improve them. The setting up of the Meat Hygiene Service has enabled us to know precisely what is going on throughout the country, and through that knowledge, and through the existence of the agency, which was opposed by the Opposition, to drive up standards. That is a very serious improvement, attributable to the Meat Hygiene Service and to Government policy.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Given the increase in E. coli infection foreshadowed by the report, why did the Minister subsequently cut by £2 million the funding for food safety research being carried out by the food research institute in Norwich, which specialised in examining the causes and effects of E. coli poisoning?

Mr. Hogg: We always have to judge at any one time what are the chief priorities for scientific research. As a matter of policy, we have substantially increased

the spending on research into BSE, in accordance with the wishes expressed in the House and with the peer assessment by those who know. I think that that was widely welcomed in this country.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that I took part in a Wednesday morning Adjournment debate on the Meat Hygiene Service initiated by an Opposition Member? The hon. Gentleman and I reflected the concern and unhappiness felt by many within the meat industry about the cost and the bureaucracy of the Meat Hygiene Service. Is it not odd, therefore, that the Opposition now seek to take what I regard as irresponsible advantage of the situation, in a manner that does no good to the consumer or to the industry?

In fact, perhaps even against my wishes, the Meat Hygiene Service, which has been responsible for revealing the problem, was set up against the wishes of the Opposition. Should we not make that obvious to the people of this country?

Madam Speaker: Order. I hope that, after that, questions will be short and to the point. They are much too long; they are comments and speeches, not questions. We must move on. We have another statement after this.

Mr. Hogg: Few hon. Members are more powerful than my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). He is right to say that the Labour party opposed the instrument by which the facts are being known and the improvements carried out. That is an absurd position for the Labour party.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Does the Minister accept that Professor Hugh Pennington is not just an eminent scientist, but a truthful and mild-mannered man? He told me this morning that he had no knowledge of the report, had not seen it and was extremely angry about it. Does the Minister not think that the House should believe him? Does he not find it incredible, against the background of 20 fatalities in Scotland, that no civil servant from MAFF or the Scottish Office thought to provide the report to Hugh Pennington? Is that not a comment on the atmosphere of secrecy over which the Government and all ministerial teams preside?

Mr. Hogg: That is nonsense. Of course Professor Pennington is a man of the utmost distinction. If he says that he has not seen the report, I am not saying he has. However, people in his group knew of the existence of the review. It would have been passing strange if they did not, because it is referred to in the annual report. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where?"] Page 18. I am glad that hon. Members have got it. They will find an explicit reference to the review on page 18, paragraph 4.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): It does not say what it said.

Mr. Hogg: It was open to the hon. Gentleman to ask for a copy of the review. He did not read it at the time, and he is now kicking himself.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is fatuous to suggest that any Minister can read every report produced by his Ministry, let alone every report produced by every agency under the aegis of his Ministry? It may be that some of his officials should have drawn his attention to the report or to passages in it, but if he was left in ignorance, it was hardly his fault, was it?

Mr. Hogg: Reference has been made to a report prepared by Mr. Swann. No report was prepared by Mr. Swann. He prepared a first draft, which his professional peers—and nobody else—found unsatisfactory. They wanted him to change it because it did not reflect their views, although they had helped to carry out the assessment. He decided not to do that. Consequently, another report was prepared—shorter and simpler to read—which was widely circulated in the industry. It is referred to explicitly as "the review" on page 18, paragraph 4.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I accept that the Minister may not have seen the report, but is he seriously suggesting to the House that, when he and his fellow Ministers came to the House to answer questions and make statements about E. coli, there was nothing in their background briefing on the contents of the report? If there was nothing, should not his civil servants be sacked? If there was, and he failed to tell the House, should not he be sacked?

Mr. Hogg: There is a serious misunderstanding here. The Government have known for a long time about the problem of, for example, faecal contamination of carcases in abattoirs. That was expressly referred to in the other place by my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Howe, when talking about poultrymeat and other regulations. The problem has existed for some time. It is one reason why the Meat Hygiene Service was set up.

We have discussed the recommendations to carry on the various works. I have had discussions with the Meat Hygiene Service, and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has had discussions with the industry on many occasions.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Does my right hon. and learned Friend have a view about why the earlier, and it seems unsatisfactory, draft of the report, which appears to have been lurking around since the end of 1995, should have been given to the press in March 1997? Does he agree that people involved in farming and the meat industry will not easily forgive those who, for purely political reasons, seek to generate a fraudulent panic about the safety of British meat?

Mr. Hogg: I suspect that many farmers and others will agree with my hon. Friend. What is absolutely certain—this is the crucial point—is that there was full discussion of the report, which was the majority view of the professionals who carried out the assessment.

That full report—28 pages of it—was put before the industry forum, which includes the National Farmers Union and others and all those in the meat industry. They had copies of it, and it was discussed. The carrying out of the review is referred to in the annual report, which was laid before the House and which has been placed in the Library of the House. Any hon. Member who wanted a copy of the document had only to ask, and we would have been pleased to send one to them.

Mr. Tony Banks: On the radio this morning, the Parliamentary Secretary said that she had not seen a copy of the report, and that it had not been drawn to her attention. With the benefit of hindsight, to which the Minister referred earlier, does he accept that it would have been better if the report had been drawn to the attention of Ministers?

Mr. Hogg: It is for Ministers to lay down policy. The implementation of the policy is the responsibility of the agency. In this case, the agency was doing three things: first, it established the benchmarks by which one can identify progress in the future; secondly, because it was taking over responsibility for functions previously held by local authorities, it determined the allocation of staff, both regionally and plant by plant; and thirdly, it wanted to use the process as the mechanism for driving up standards. All those things come into the category of implementing policy.

I have the highest confidence in the chief executive of the Meat Hygiene Service. He knows his function, which is to tackle this sort of problem. He will keep Ministers informed about the detailed implementation to the extent that he deems necessary, but he is primarily responsible for the implementation of the policy, and I have every confidence in him.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): Does my right hon. and learned Friend share my disappointment at the way in which the matter has been reported, particularly on television programmes today? The sight of filthy animals going into abattoirs caused me to telephone Southern Counties and Romford Meats to ask what it would do if it was presented with animals in that condition. I was told, unequivocally, that any such animals would be sent straight back to where they came from.

Mr. Hogg: That is absolutely right. If one looks at the report, which was circulated among the industry and was the subject of discussion within the industry, one can see that great weight is placed upon the ante-mortem inspections. It is made plain in that document that, if cattle are presented in a filthy state, they will be rejected. It is important for everybody in the industry to understand that, if cattle turn up at an abattoir in the state to which some people have referred, they will be sent straight back to where they came from.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): On several occasions, the Minister has mentioned page 18, paragraph 4 of the Meat Hygiene Service report. Will he confirm that that survey makes no reference to the report under discussion—either the draft report or the subsequent report—and talks merely about a "national review" taking place? That review could presumably have led to a report later. If that is to be interpreted as a report, why are Opposition Members guilty of not having read the report, when Ministers are held to be innocent for not having seen it or had it presented to them?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman has not done me justice. I said in the statement that the fact—only the fact—of the review was explicitly referred to on page 18 of the annual report.

Mr. Tony Banks: We have all got it.

Mr. Hogg: I am glad that everyone has it. The hon. Gentleman should read it. In case he cannot understand it, I shall read some of it for him. Paragraph 4 on page 18 says:

"MHS Hygiene Advice Teams (HATs) involved two-person teams of experienced OVSs and MHIs who, during 1995/96, assessed, through individual plant audits"—

the point that I made to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler)—

"standards and inspection processes at all licensed premises throughout Great Britain. This national review provided the first comprehensive benchmarking of standards and practices within the fresh meat industry"—

and it goes on. I have never heard of a review that does not generate a document.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Have there been any prosecutions as a result of the report? I believe that there have. If so, is that not evidence of its great value in driving up standards as my right hon. and learned Friend said, and would not reports of such prosecutions have provided an opportunity for the Opposition and anyone else to pick up information about the report? Should not Professor Pennington have done that also?

Mr. Hogg: The report and the process have indeed driven up standards; that is plain from the report that was discussed by the industry forum. I do not know the number of prosecutions offhand, so I shall write to my hon. Friend. I can tell him, however, that I have told the chief executive of the Meat Hygiene Service that, if the facts justify it, he must not hesitate to prosecute.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will the Minister tell us clearly when he read the annual report of the Meat Hygiene Service, a copy of which was placed in the Library before the last summer vacation? Why, when he read it, did he not call for a copy of that damning report? He cannot have it both ways: he cannot argue that Opposition Members should have asked for the report when he himself never asked for it.

Mr. Hogg: I have already made the position plain. Ministers are responsible for policy. In this class of case, the implementation of policy is the responsibility of the Meat Hygiene Service. I am absolutely confident in the quality of that service and in the competence of its chief executive. I am happy to leave to him the responsibility for implementation, which is a role imposed on him by Parliament.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that some people in the west midlands and Staffordshire—the owners of abattoirs that have had to close or have had to have a great deal of money spent on them to bring them up to the standards required by the Meat Hygiene Service—will be pretty sick of this debate? They will know that Her Majesty's inspectors went in and made such closures as

a result of that review. Is it not further the case that, if it had been left to the Labour party, there would have been no Meat Hygiene Service and no review?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It is true that, if it had been left to the Labour party, we would have had no Meat Hygiene Service, no report, no review, no discussion, and standards would not have been driven up. It is also true—there is a certain irony here—that most of the complaints that I have received are not about low standards and so forth, but about closing small abattoirs because of the higher standards. The plain truth is that we are driving standards up, and, as a consequence, some small abattoirs have been closed.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The charge, surely, is that the annual report of the Meat Hygiene Service, which was published in June last year, gave no warning—least of all to people who, like me, are interested in the matter—that there was anything so bad in our slaughterhouses. I have read the Swann report, and it makes chilling reading. The Minister said that the purpose of the report was to establish benchmarks in the slaughterhouse industry. How many slaughterhouses were not up to standard in December 1995, and how many in March 1996, when the BSE crisis broke? He should have the figures at his fingertips.

Mr. Hogg: The review process had three purposes: first, to establish benchmarking and to take an overview of the state of the industry, which had previously been in the hands of the local authorities; secondly, to determine the allocation of resources; and thirdly, to drive up standards, both nationally through national practices, and on a plant basis, by on-plant discussion with the plant operator, based on the plant report. There is no doubt that the effect of that process has been greatly to improve standards.

If the Labour party had had its way, this business would still be in the hands of the local authorities; we would not be having this discussion; standards would be as they were when they were in the control of local authorities; and we would all be much worse off.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Is it not regrettable that some people are willing to use food scares to embarrass the Government, and, in doing so, unnecessarily alarm members of the public? Was there not a typical example of that this afternoon, when the Leader of the Opposition stirred it for all he was worth but did not even stay to hear the facts from my right hon. and learned Friend?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to that. The Leader of the Opposition asked my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister three questions on the report and then walked out, even though he knew that a statement was coming. If he was seriously interested in the matter, and not merely trying to make cheap political capital, he would have listened to the facts. He did not, and the country will judge him accordingly.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Can I tell the Minister that the Leader of the Opposition is one of the few Members who has read the whole report? The Minister has all his Ministers with him. Did any Minister or civil servant issue an instruction, write a letter or send a memo to anyone suggesting that this report be given only limited circulation because of the danger of it generating concern among the British public?

Mr. Hogg: I had hoped that, by explaining the process, I would have answered questions such as this. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] Mr. Swann carried out, along with others, assessments of abattoirs. He was asked by the editorial board, which comprised his peers, to produce a first report. That editorial board found, in its professional judgment, that the draft report was unsatisfactory. It asked him to make changes; he declined. At that point, it commissioned another expert, who was also involved in the assessment—he had done the poultry section—to do the red meat section, and that he did. The report that emerged and that was subsequently circulated to the industry represents the majority view of the veterinary experts who carried out the review, and no other.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I ask a troubling constituency question? West Lothian council and I endlessly, over three years, wrote to and met Scottish Office officials about the outbreak at Redhouse dairy in Blackburn in my constituency, which was the first E. coli 0157 outbreak in recent times. Are we to understand that neither the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), nor the Earl of Lindsay, the Minister responsible for agriculture, nor the Secretary of State for Scotland was alerted to the report?

When my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) asked, very properly, about the figure of £1 million, the Parliamentary Secretary shook her head. What were the costs of the report, and why was it not brought to the attention of Scottish Office Ministers, who were faced on a day-to-day basis with the entreaties of West Lothian council and others who were affected?

Mr. Hogg: The cost, speaking off the cuff, was not £1 million. I think that it was £454,000, but if I am wrong, I apologise, and I will write to the hon. Gentleman. On the report's availability, the final report—the one that was circulated to the industry—was made available to all concerned, including the Scottish Office.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Am I right in saying that, when the Minister placed the document to which he referred in the House of Commons Library, he assumed that there was another document associated with it? Is he telling the House that that is what the paragraph to which he referred means? Does he ever ask for such documents to be brought to his attention, or has he published a paragraph in that report which he did not understand? Is that not an indictment of him?

Mr. Hogg: I have never said that a copy of the final report was laid in the Library. What was laid in the Library was the annual report, which states in terms in paragraph 4 on page 18 that a review was carried out. As anyone who knows anything about government knows full well, a review generates a report. If anyone wanted the report, he had only to get on the telephone and ask for it. I would have sent him a lordly number.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Have we not seen today a deplorable exhibition of casuistry by the Minister,

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

who admits that he has received a report in his Department which cost half a million pounds and made the most serious complaints about the state of the meat hygiene industry? He was unaware of the seriousness of the report, and neither he nor his Ministers asked to see the report. Is that not a confession of incompetence?

Does the Minister not think that the country is getting fed up with the weekly promulgation by members of the Government of their doctrine of ministerial infallibility? Why is it that everything that goes wrong is the result of the work of officials, and everything that goes right is the result of the work of Ministers?

Mr. Hogg: Just occasionally, Opposition Members should try to get their minds around the simplest of propositions. Just to encourage them, I will repeat it. Policy is a matter for Ministers. As this is a particular case, the implementation of policy is a matter for the agency. I have total confidence in the chief executive. He has put in hand a process which has informed the industry what needs to happen and is driving up standards. Had the matter been left as the Labour party wanted it, there would have been no improvement of any kind.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Most consumers will have welcomed the establishment of the Meat Hygiene Service and its drive for higher standards, and will have noted that its inception was opposed by the main Opposition party. Can my right hon. and learned Friend assure me and all other United Kingdom consumers that meat and meat products that are imported into Britain are slaughtered and transported to the same high standards that apply in this country?

Mr. Hogg: I have always said, because I believed it, that British beef, as now is, is the best and safest in Europe. The reason for that is the rules we put into place, such as the 30-month rule, controls on cattle rations and controls in abattoirs. I want to see, and I am pressing for, similar regimes in Europe. Until the Europeans have put those things in place, I shall continue saying and believing that British beef is the best and safest in the Community.

Business of the House

4.23 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week.

MONDAY 10 MARCH—Opposition Day [7th allotted day] (first part). Until 7 pm, there will be a debate entitled "Public Responsibility for Social and Economic Justice" on a motion in the names of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru.

Second Reading of the Building Societies Bill.

TUESDAY 11 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Finance Bill.

WEDNESDAY 12 MARCH—Until 12.30 pm, debate on the first report from the Scottish Affairs Committee on the removal of tariff rebate subsidy on Northern Isles Freight, followed by a debate on the first report from the Select Committee on Agriculture on the United Kingdom dairy industry and the common agricultural policy dairy regime. That will be followed by debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

In the afternoon, there will debates on motions on the Representation of the People (Amendment) Regulations, the Representation of the People (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations, the Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations, the Local Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order, the European Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Regulations and the European Parliamentary Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations. Those are the regulations about which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) asked me last week.

Remaining stages of the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill *[Lords]*.

At 10 pm, the House will be asked to agree all outstanding excess votes, the spring supplementary estimates, and the defence votes A.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill.

THURSDAY 13 MARCH—Debate on future pensions policy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 14 MARCH—The House will not be sitting.

Once again, I am able to give the House only limited information about business for the following week.

MONDAY 17 MARCH—Committee and remaining stages of the Building Societies Bill.

Remaining stages of the Birds (Registration Charges) Bill.

The House will also wish to know that, on Wednesday 19 March, there will be a debate on structural funds and cohesion policy in European Standing Committee B.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report.*

[*Wednesday 19 March:*

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community documents: 11382/96, Structural Funds; 12614/96, Cohesion Policy. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 36-xi (1996-97).]

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I thank the Leader of the House for the limited information that he has, once again, been able to give us. He will recall that, last week, he told the House that the Easter recess would be

"in the vicinity of Easter."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 1997; Vol. 291, c. 452.]

Does that mean that there will be an Easter recess? If so, surely the sooner the dates are announced, the better. Will the right hon. Gentleman also confirm that the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges can meet during any recess?

Last week, the Leader of the House promised to draw to the attention of colleagues our request for a debate, before its privatisation, on the future of the Building Research Establishment. In view of the alarming facts that have been unearthed by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) about that privatisation and the contradictions contained in answers to parliamentary questions on the matter, surely we should have such a debate before the contracts are signed.

The Leader of the House has announced that next week the House will debate amendments to the regulations that govern elections. Have the Government considered improving the arrangements in polling stations, to reduce the number of spoilt ballot papers? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the last time the general election was held on the same day as local elections, the number of spoilt papers for general election candidates rose threefold, mainly because electors voted for more than one candidate, as they are sometimes entitled to do in local elections? As we know that local elections will be held on 1 May, including those for the new unitary authorities, what steps are the Government taking to reduce the possibility of an unusually high number of spoilt ballot papers, should the general election fall on the same day?

Finally, may I thank the Leader of the House for arranging the debate on pensions, to be held on Thursday of next week, as I had intended to ask him once again whether we could have such a debate? May we hope that the Secretary of State for Social Security will confirm during that debate that the Government's proposals on pensions will mean the abolition of the basic state pension and the abolition of the state earnings-related pension scheme—SERPS—and that the Government intend to spend billions of pounds of taxpayers' money on privatising the pensions of millions of people? We welcome the debate, because it will be an opportunity to warn the young and the old alike that one cannot trust the Tories on pensions.

Mr. Newton: On the Easter recess, I thought that my statement last week was admirably clear, and I am certainly not in a position further to clarify it this afternoon. On the Standards and Privileges Committee, the hon. Lady knows the answer to her question, as we were together responsible for the regime under which it operates: it can, of course, meet during a recess.

On the question of the future of the Building Research Establishment and the associated points that the hon. Lady made, she will not be surprised to learn that I am not in a position to promise a debate, but I shall ensure that her comments are examined by my right hon. Friends in the relevant field. On the matter of spoilt ballot papers, I am not in a position to confirm whether the general election and the local elections will coincide, but I am sure that, were they to do so, my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Home Office who are responsible for electoral matters would consider her remarks with care.

Lastly, on pensions, to be perfectly honest I am slightly surprised that the Opposition were thinking of asking for a debate on pensions, because it is increasingly clear that they have no policy of their own on pensions. It is also clear that they do not understand our policy and therefore mis-state what that policy is.

Sir Roger Sims (Chislehurst): May I remind my right hon. Friend of the correspondence between us on the topic of the report of the national commission of inquiry into the prevention of child abuse, of which I was a member? Given the importance of that issue and current public interest in it, may I ask my right hon. Friend to find a slot between now and the end of this Parliament, to give the House an opportunity to debate the report and its recommendations?

Mr. Newton: I greatly respect the interest that my hon. Friend has taken in those matters over many years. As he has referred to the letter that he wrote to me, he will recall that I have indicated to him informally that I thought that a Wednesday morning application might be the best way. I ought to admit that I have some slight reservations about whether this is an appropriate time for such a debate, while there is such a large and important inquiry into such matters going on in Wales. It may be that when that report appears—it certainly will not be in this Parliament—would be a more appropriate time for a debate.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): If I was right to think that the House might sit until Maundy Thursday and that we might come back for two days on 7 and 8 April to fit in for a 1 May election, would the Leader of the House consider whether we might use that time to the full and pick up the debates that we normally have before the end of the Session, but which we have not yet had? Those debates are: foreign affairs, especially with Hong Kong issues on people's minds; Northern Ireland, in the light of the ending of the talks yesterday; women's issues, which we had last year; and London, which we are promised every year.

Mr. Newton: All I can say is that, were the hon. Gentleman's speculation to become reality, I would consider his and other suggestions.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the disgraceful way in which two members of the Labour party tried to destroy the Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, which was promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). In view of the fact that the House has been rising early recently and given that it will doubtless continue to do so on some evenings in the future, will he consider the possibility of the Government taking over the Bill, which the Government have backed and which would have the overwhelming support of anybody in this country who wants to stop Britain becoming a haven for the most serious international criminals?

Mr. Newton: Of course, I understand my hon. and learned Friend's point and I note his suggestion; but he

[Mr. Newton]

will be aware that it has been settled policy, not only in my time, but over the past nearly 18 years, that the Government—however strongly they approve of proposals in private Members' Bills—have hesitated, to put it mildly, before picking and choosing about providing Government time for one Bill rather than another.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Leader of the House accept that, if the Government did change their mind and bring forward that Bill and give it time, they would be giving time to the Government's own Bill, which they handed to a Back Bencher to promote on a Friday? Will he bear it in mind that, if they did that, it would give some of us a chance to explain that we were not against the provisions on drugs or certain other aspects of the Bill, but against the part of the Bill that deals with freedom fighters and that would land them in gaol at the whim of the Attorney-General? If that part of the Bill were taken out, he could have a guarantee from me and other Labour Members that we would give the Bill a clear run.

The Government could not find more than 20 Members last Friday. Within hours of that wonderful Wirral by-election success for Labour, the dispirited forces on the Conservative Benches were apparent to all and, at twenty minutes to 10, this lousy, rotten Government did not even have more than 20 people to carry their legislation through.

Why do not the Government resign?

Mr. Newton: I take it that the hon. Gentleman has just delivered the speech that he would have delivered last Friday, had he not deprived himself of the opportunity to make a speech by the procedural device that was employed. I cannot say that I am happy to have done so, but I have listened—enthralled, as always—to what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South–West): Has my right hon. Friend seen the results of a recent MORI poll, commissioned by Zee television, an Asian network, which show that 62 per cent. of the Asian residents of this country who were polled by MORI held the view that the current immigration and asylum regulations were too lenient?

Does not my right hon. Friend agree that we owe it to the whole nation—including the Asian community, which has been so successful here—to have a proper debate and discussion about the Opposition's proposals fundamentally to relax the immigration rules, and especially the primary purpose rule? Do we not owe it to everyone to use the House to discuss something that is of real importance and concern?

Mr. Newton: It is certainly the case that we regard the primary purpose rule as an essential safeguard to prevent abuse by people using marriage as a means of obtaining settlement in this country but, beyond that, I would want to emphasise, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did in responding to my hon. Friend on Tuesday, that our approach rests very much on pursuing calmly and dispassionately, in as non-partisan a way as possible, the firm but fair immigration policies that underpin the improvement in race relations in this country.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Would the Leader of the House like to come to the House next week with his colleagues from the Department of Transport to make a statement about the reasons for the marked lack of urgency in their approach to ferry safety? It will soon be Easter, which is usually regarded as the beginning of the holiday season, when many people will travel on ferries without being certain that safety standards are being maintained that would prevent a repetition of the appalling Zeebrugge accident. May we have some urgent action on that matter?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady, who is expert in those matters, knows that a great deal of action has taken place; as it happens, regulations to introduce a higher survivability standard for roll on/roll off passenger ferries will come into force next month.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Following the earlier question by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South–West (Mr. Budgen), may I urge my right hon. Friend to hold a debate on the workings of the new law that we sensibly introduced, to require employers to check that their employees have valid work permits or some other legal reason for working if they are not British citizens? I further urge on him that there is a very grave danger that, were that law to be repealed at the moment when the minimum wage was introduced, we could have what several of our continental partners have experienced—spiralling domestic unemployment on one hand and, on the other, an ugly growth of illegal and dangerous sweatshops, where illegal immigrants were exploited by unscrupulous employers wanting to undercut that wage rate.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend makes several additional points and comparisons with what is happening elsewhere, but I cannot sensibly seek to add to what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South–West (Mr. Budgen) a few moments ago.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Forgive me for intruding into a Front Benches' china shop and, I suspect, a legal mire, but I raised with the Leader of the House a month ago the statements on television, so far unchallenged, of Mr. Mohammed Al-Fayed who said, parading banknotes, that Members of Parliament could be hired like London taxis. Although I do not doubt the good faith of the Front-Bench negotiations and the legal difficulties, the House of Commons is in some difficulty. As we go into an election, people see that the statements from Mohammed Al-Fayed, which are deeply damaging to Parliament, are unchallenged. May we have an assurance that an attempt will be made to resolve the matter? The Standards and Privileges Committee can meet during the recess, but is unlikely to do so, for understandable reasons.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman referred to negotiations as if that was a usual channels matter between the two principal parties in the House, but it has nothing to do with that. The hon. Member for Dewsbury

(Mrs. Taylor) and I speak to each other, as we are both members of the Standards and Privileges Committee, but much of the material relevant to the hon. Gentleman's comments is currently under examination by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, who will produce a report. I have no doubt that he is working as hard as he can.

On a related matter, the hon. Gentleman may not yet be aware of the fact that a substantial report by the Parliamentary Commissioner, also connected with suggestions made by Mr. Al-Fayed, in this case relating to the Home Secretary, was published one hour and 10 minutes ago. The hon. Gentleman might wish to look at it.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend initiate an early debate on the terms of reference and competencies of the local government ombudsman? That would enable the Secretary of State for the Environment to judge the strong arguments in favour of strengthening the power of redress of the ombudsman against such malpractices as the advertisement—three months in advance of the public inquiry, let alone the granting of planning permission—of a tender worth £3 million for the construction of social housing on a recreation ground on green chain land in my constituency.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will understand that all I can say is that I shall ensure that the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is drawn to what he said.

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): Is the Leader of the House aware that this Saturday, 8 March, is International Women's Day? May I remind him that it has become customary to have a debate in the House at this time of the year about matters of concern to women, and that last year that debate was held in Government time? Can the Leader of the House explain why the Government have not been willing to allocate time this year, and will he reconsider, in view of the insulting remarks of the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) about women?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady has added to the rather long list given to me earlier by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), of subjects that we seek to debate at more or less annual intervals. I shall bear in mind the subject that the hon. Lady wants us to debate in the near future, but she will understand that there are a number of other uncertainties.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): May I back up the calls of my hon. Friends the Members for Wolverhampton, South–West (Mr. Budgen) and for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) for a debate on race relations in Britain, so that I can point out that the firm control of immigration over the past 18 years has contributed significantly to the vast improvement in race relations? For example, an Asian constituent of mine said to me only last week that his community has not had to put up with the violence and intimidation from skinheads over the past 18 years that was so prevalent in the 1970s, particularly when the previous Labour Government were in office.

Mr. Newton: I shall take note of my hon. Friend's suggestion, along with the similar suggestions made earlier by my two other hon. Friends.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): As today is the 10th anniversary of the entirely predictable and avoidable deaths of 194 people on the Herald of Free Enterprise, how can the Leader of the House be happy that pretty basic new safety regulations will come into force in a month, 10 years and one month after that disaster?

Is it not horrific that the ferry industry is already trying to circumvent those regulations? Four ferries should have been subject to the new safety regulations this year, but two are to be sent down to the Mediterranean, where they will not be subject to the regulations, and the regulations will not apply to the other two ferries. Is it not a disgrace that the new safety regulations are being avoided? Sixty ferries—which is 60 per cent. of the ferries using British ports—will not have new safety features installed in them for five years, until October 2002. We urgently need a debate on those matters, as ferry transport is the only form of passenger transport in which, when a disaster occurs, the systems are not changed to failsafe, but are allowed to fail in the future as they have in the past, dangerously and lethally.

Mr. Newton: Although I cannot promise a debate, I can point to the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is due to answer questions on Monday. The hon. Gentleman should, perhaps, have acknowledged that a wide range of measures has been introduced over the past 10 years to contribute to the improved safety of ferries. In his question he provided part of the answer: clearly, this is a matter in which, if possible, it is best to proceed internationally, which takes a good deal of time. The UK has been at the forefront of negotiations for improved standards. The Stockholm agreement on ferry safety is a major achievement, whose requirements go significantly beyond those applicable in the rest of the world.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): Having heard the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Sir R. Sims), and that of the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) concerning a possible debate on women, will my right hon. Friend consider, as an alternative, a debate on children? Children are of enormous importance to everyone and the responsibility of virtually every Department. We frequently receive in our postbags complaints about the Government arising from lack of co-ordination in other areas, but the Government have a fine record on their policy on children. As an alternative to last year's debate on women, would it not be appropriate to have a full-scale Government debate on children?

Mr. Newton: I acknowledge, not least as a former Minister in that area, the importance of the subject that my hon. Friend has raised, but I am bound to say that with the list of requests for debate that I have received in

[Mr. Newton]

the past 20 minutes, it is not just the Standards and Privileges Committee that would be sitting during any recess.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): On Wednesday, we are to debate regulations on the representation of the people. Would not that be a good opportunity to discuss the state of the electoral register in the run-up to the general election, and to see whether it is in as bad a state as it was last year and whether there are millions missing from the register? In preparation for the debate, will the Government publish the number of people who are on the electoral register?

Answers are being given in connection with Northern Ireland. In reply to a question on Scotland, I was given the wrong figures—last year's. I cannot get the figures for England and Wales until the end of March. I understand that there are five returning officers who have not yet submitted their figures. May we have provisional lists, and could those areas be contacted to find out the details?

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what I told the hon. Gentleman last week, to which he referred. I am sure that his remarks about the five returning officers will be examined by those responsible for producing the figures as soon as possible.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton–Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): May I ask my right hon. Friend for a debate on the training of our national firefighters, so that I could draw the attention of the House to early-day motion 608, tabled by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile)?

[*That this House notes the internal publication of a report on Health and Safety at the Fire Service College, Moreton in Marsh, Gloucestershire; further notes that the report was in response to recent accidents at the college; is concerned that the report made observations concerning risk to those at the college; agrees with the report that 'burning people, exhausting them or otherwise putting them at risk is not high on the objectives of the training programme' at the college; is surprised that in his Answer of 20th January to the honourable Member for Montgomery, Official Report, column 430, concerning health and safety at the college, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Home Office, the honourable Member for Bolton West, made no reference to the report or the problems the report identifies and expressed himself satisfied with the health and safety situation at the college; and calls on the Government immediately to assess the needs of the Fire Service College so that full health and safety measures are implemented.*]

The hon. and learned Gentleman scurrilously put on the record and quoted from an internal report that was produced for the Fire Service College in my constituency, without giving any warning to the college or to me as the constituency Member. Does my right hon. Friend agree that such a debate would allow me to bring to the attention of the House the outstanding qualities of the Fire Service College, which were recognised in an answer given to me today by the Home Secretary? The finances of the college have been radically overhauled, so it now faces a certain future and can go out into the national and international market and sell itself on the excellence of the training that it provides.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend's question gives him an opportunity to make those points about the college. I share his surprise—I think that that is the appropriate word—that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) should have tabled such a motion without consulting the constituency Member or checking the facts with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary or the college.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): May we have a debate on the export of live animals for slaughter? In that respect, I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 615.

[*That this House calls attention to the transportation of sheep from Dover on the MV 'Caroline' on, or about, Friday 7th March; notes that the vessel is chartered by Live Sheep Traders of Dublin and operated by Mr. Roger Mills of Framlingham, Suffolk, who himself has a conviction for keeping animals in an unfit condition; further notes that the old cull ewes will be making a sea crossing of between 9 and 12 hours, subsequently to be moved via Holland or Belgium to the killing fields of Paris where they will be ritually slaughtered for the festival of Eid; believes the journey times, conditions of transportation and method of killing to be unacceptable to public opinion and contrary to EU law; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to take immediate steps to prevent this barbarous trade from taking place.*]

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that old cull ewes will be crammed on to MV Caroline and exported from Dover to France, where they will be taken to fields outside Paris and ritually slaughtered? Would he be interested in seeing the photographic evidence that I have of ewes giving birth while their throats are cut and they are bled over ditches? Is not that an obscene and disgusting trade? If we cannot debate the issue, will the right hon. Gentleman draw it to the attention of Ministers, to ensure that the trade does not continue?

Mr. Newton: I think the hon. Gentleman knows that I share his general view about the importance of animal welfare matters. Enforcement of the slaughter rules in Paris is clearly a matter for the French authorities, but I assure him that we are in touch with them about it.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): My right hon. Friend will be aware that parents at eight out of nine secondary schools in Gravesham and at a further three schools in the borough have voted for those schools to become grant-maintained. May we have a debate next week on grant-maintained schools? I wish to express the growing concern of those parents that Labour would overrule their decision and claw back 15 per cent. of education funds from the schools, to the central bureaucracy of the local education authority.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend's best bet is probably the return to this place of the Education Bill from another place.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): The Leader of the House may be aware that Imperial Metals

is to close Yorkshire Alloys Ltd., which provides more than 400 jobs in my constituency and more than 200 jobs in Smethwick. Will he note the fact that the company exports to the tune of £25 million a year, which would be a serious loss to the British economy, and is also an important contributor to defence sales in this country? Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that Ministers are made aware of the situation so that, when I seek an opportunity to raise the matter again in the House, they will be able to provide some answers concerning the reaction of Government Departments—particularly that of the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry—to that important occurrence?

Mr. Newton: I certainly take note of such matters myself. I have hastily scanned the rather large number of ministerial colleagues on the Front Bench, who are clearly fascinated by today's business questions, and I am glad to say that a Department of Trade and Industry Minister is present to take direct delivery of that point.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): When will my right hon. Friend make time for the annual summer economic debate? Could summer come early this year, so that we may reiterate the statement of the noble Lord Barnett that the economy is doing well, and so that I, as the father of two teenagers, might welcome the fact that job opportunities for school leavers in this country are much better than those in Germany, France, Spain and Italy, where they have been decimated by the minimum wage?

Mr. Newton: I am not in a position to pre-empt or predict the speech that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will make in a few moments, but I should be surprised if my hon. Friend did not hear a little reiteration of Lord Barnett's comments.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Was the hon. Gentleman in the Chamber when the Leader of the House made his statement?

Mr. Winterton: I was indeed.

Madam Speaker: I am sorry; I did not see the hon. Gentleman. I shall accept his word.

Mr. Winterton: My constituency of Macclesfield has one of lowest levels of unemployment in the country under a prudent Conservative borough council. The United Kingdom has a prudent Conservative Government and what is cited by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission as the strongest economy in Europe. In support of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), could we debate the economy and taxation before the Dissolution of Parliament, so that the House can give mature consideration to those issues and compare the Government's record with what is on offer from the Opposition parties?

Mr. Newton: If I may say so, Madam Speaker, I think that such an opportunity will arise as soon as hon. Members stop asking me questions.

Point of Order

4.55 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have notified the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) of my intention to refer to him this afternoon in relation to his allegation against me last night, which appears at column 960 of *Hansard*, that I had invited the IRA to the House. As you will recall, Madam Speaker, the allegation was made in connection with admissions by the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) regarding references to Ms Roisin McAliskey. I regard the allegation as extremely serious and totally unfounded. I have written to you about the matter, Madam Speaker, and I should be grateful to know what action you intend to take, as I regard the withdrawal of the allegation by the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone as most important.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that I was in the Chair for much of the debate last night, when I heard all the exchanges and the points of order that were raised. I thought that he made his position very clear at the time by way of a point of order. I read the debate this morning, and I am still of that opinion.

Public Expenditure

[Relevant document: Minutes of evidence taken before the Treasury Committee on 5 March (HC355).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

4.56 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine): No serious commentator can doubt the Government's commitment to containing the levels of public expenditure, while a glance at the Labour Benches shows clearly the total absence of any Opposition interest in the subject. In 1975–76, public expenditure absorbed more than 47 per cent. of our gross domestic product, which included massive subsidies to the nationalised industries. That figure was broadly in line with other European economies, and it went hand in hand with high levels of taxation. We had punitive levels of direct taxation—a basic rate of 34p in the pound, rising to 98p for high earners—and, as one would expect, a level of inflation significantly worse than that of our principal international competitors. The average for the period 1974 to 1979 of 15.5 per cent. sounds like an incredible figure today.

The Government's consistent prime objective has been to lower the level of public expenditure and to provide incentives through the tax system to encourage a faster-growing economy. In the next financial year, we are set to meet our target of reducing public expenditure below 40 per cent. of GDP. On the continent, the figures remain conspicuously higher: 49 per cent. in Germany, 52 per cent. in Italy, and 53 per cent. in France. That contrast has led to a quite different performance in this country from that of earlier decades.

In the 1960s and 1970s, we outpaced only Switzerland and New Zealand of the 25 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries in the growth of GDP per head. Since 1979, the United Kingdom has grown at a faster rate than Switzerland, France, Canada, the United States and another eight OECD countries. Since 1992, we have enjoyed the longest, strongest and steadiest recovery of any major European economy. Furthermore, according to the OECD, this country is set to be the fastest-growing major European economy not only in the year just ended, but in the next two years as well.

The other hallmark of that period is that, while the Conservatives in government have battled determinedly to achieve those successes, every significant reform that has led to such a desirable product has been resisted by the Labour party. Labour resisted our tax cuts, trade union reform, and each and every privatisation of the loss-making, or, indeed profit-making, nationalised industries. It resisted every change until we have proved that it works.

One can judge the quality of Tory initiatives by the vociferousness of Labour's opposition. If we get a bad headline in the *Daily Mirror*, that means that we are on a right track. If we get a yah-boo reaction from a Labour spokesman, that initiative becomes tomorrow's policy. Best of all, if we get downright opposition from the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) to an initiative, it is halfway to being in the Labour party's manifesto.

If I needed any final commendation of the brilliant initiative announced yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, it was Labour's knee-jerk reaction to it. We proposed to reduce public expenditure by £40 billion a year. We showed how we could increase significantly the funding available for investment, and as a product of that, offer an old-age pension of £175 a week, in a major, far-sighted reform of state pension funding. What do we get? New Labour, old Labour—every variety of Labour—on the airwaves searching for fat cats under the bed. It was a classic and typical response, and the louder they shouted, the more convinced I became.

Contrast our initiative with Labour's exploded initiative for pension reform. The leader of the Labour party lands in Singapore to proclaim that he has found the ultimate stakeholder pension scheme—whizz-bang, all-singing, all-dancing, and, above all else, run by the state. There is a small snag: the rate of return since 1980 on the state-run Singapore compulsory scheme is 2 per cent. above inflation. The rate of return on the British pension funds over the same period is almost 10 per cent. above inflation—collapse of stakeholder pension proposals.

Since the previous election, bruised by the humiliation of one electoral reverse after another, the Labour party has sought to recreate its popular support on the basis of expenditure pledges. So far, by our calculation, there have been £30 billion-worth of them. Not one has been renounced by the Labour party. Hardly any have ever been clearly shown as being funded in any coherent way, with the exception of one or two to which I shall come.

Nobody listening to what Labour has had to say should have the slightest doubt—those are not small commitments lightly given, or Conservative central office trying to misinterpret the words—that those are categoric, black and white statements.

The Leader of the Opposition said:

"We will give Britain a publicly owned, publicly accountable British Rail."

There is no hesitancy, no doubt, no qualification there.

We calculate the cost of restoring the railways to public ownership at £920 million a year. What figure do Labour provide? Or does it now admit that the privatisation of the railways is proving as successful and as irreversible as all the other privatisation measures?

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): It is costing twice as much.

The Deputy Prime Minister: If it is costing twice as much, why does not the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) stand and say that the Labour party will halve the cost, and tell us how it is going to do that? The fact is that it has no idea of how to run a railway, or, indeed, a whelk stall.

The right hon. Gentleman has a very clear commitment on a statutory national minimum wage, which we can explore. He told us that—again, this is black and white, no qualification—there should be, and there will be, a statutory national minimum wage. The right hon. Gentleman nods his head.

Mr. Prescott: Absolutely.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Right, well let us therefore parade in evidence the right hon. Gentleman's

election address of 1992. Very helpfully, he did something that is rare for the Labour party and costed the minimum wage. He argued for a statutory minimum wage of about £3.40 an hour. He will not deny that. It was in his election address. If there is any doubt—*[Interruption.]* I had only a little time to do a back-of-the-envelope calculation today, but I have calculated that £3.40 an hour in 1992 would be £4.26 an hour now. Is that the figure, or was £3.40 in 1992 too high and therefore £3.40 today would be adequate, even allowing for inflation? Or is there another figure? Is there any figure? We saw the energetic nodding of the right hon. Gentleman's head—I think that even he knows that when he nods his head it means that he is agreeing with what I am saying—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Prescott: That was extremely funny.

The Deputy Prime Minister: It was extremely funny.

The problem is that the right hon. Gentleman has given a whole new meaning to the saying, "Economics first and foremost, stupid". The annual cost of a minimum wage of £4.26 an hour is £3,700 million. I do not say that that is the figure that Labour has in mind, but it must have some figure in mind, so why cannot it tell us what it is?

The shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment has been helpful again. He said:

"We will offer teachers of long standing a sabbatical period out of school at public expense."

He was quite categoric. Labour must have done some calculations. How many teachers? That is not difficult to work out. How long a period? Anybody can get a slide rule. What is the cost? We think that it is £1,300 million a year.

Then the shadow Chancellor told us that, under Labour, the tax and benefits system and the benefit tapers must be addressed. The cost of reducing the tapers would be £1,800 million a year. Let me show hon. Members how that massive confidence trick is pulled.

About a fortnight ago when I was on television with the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, he was asked: "Should anyone, regardless of age, have access to free eyesight and dental tests as a matter of routine?" It was a perfectly reasonable question, and a matter of high politics. I have no complaint about that. He replied: "Yes, I think it should be a right." Anyone listening to that might have thought that yes meant yes, and that if it was to be a right, a Government of which he was deputy leader—and now, as I read in *The Sunday Times* Secretary of State for the Environment —would give it legal backing.

I hardly said a word on that particular point, but I was amazed a day or two later to read, "Three more Tory lies". I had not said anything. It was the right hon. Gentleman who said that it would be a right. The article said:

"Lie one. Labour will spend £216 million on free eye and dental tests. John Prescott gave no such spending commitment. The Tories have deliberately misquoted him. This proposal is not in our early manifesto. New Labour, new life for Britain."

We never said that it was. He just said it a fortnight ago, conveniently in the middle of the Wirral, South by-election.

Mr. Prescott *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: Of course.

Mr. Prescott: The Deputy Prime Minister will recall that, in that debate, I was asked by a person in the audience whether I believe, as he rightly reported, that eye and dental tests should be free in the health service. Those were not the exact words, but that was the intention of the question. I said that that should be the aim of a national health service—*[Interruption.]* The Deputy Prime Minister can check the record if he likes.

I said that it should be the aim of a health service that was introduced by a Labour Government who gave those pledges and commitments in 1945. That was what we brought to this country and that should be our aim. I was then asked whether that was a commitment and I made it clear that it was not a commitment, but an aim. When the Government sought to reduce the rate of taxation to 20p, they said that it was an aim, not a commitment. What is the difference?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We have achieved that for a large number of people. The right hon. Gentleman does not even know that we have reduced the rate of income tax to 20p for a large number of people. The shadow Chief Secretary is looking closely at his papers. It is embarrassing for the Opposition when the deputy leader of the Labour party does not even know the minimum rate of taxation. It is no wonder that they keep him under wraps for most of the time. However, the right hon. Gentleman has been extremely helpful and we must take his comments extremely seriously—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friends must be fair to the right hon. Gentleman.

It is important that we should not mislead or misquote anyone or omit anything from the record. Helpfully, I have the quotation from the BBC programme "Close Up North" on 20 February 1997. The words are here and I shall put them on the record. The right hon. Gentleman said:

"Yes. I think it should be a right."

When he was told:

"You've got to find the money to finance it",

he said:

"I agree, and we have to deal with that particular argument."

If you had been listening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as an elderly person—*[Interruption.]* I was making no reflection on you, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I was trying to recall the person who asked the right hon. Gentleman that question. If I recall, it was an elderly person who was concerned to find out whether there would be free eye tests under a future Labour Government. If I had asked that question, I would feel that I had been conned by the right hon. Gentleman.

It is a technique. Whatever cuts or adjustments we have made, the Opposition have criticised them. They have made pledge after pledge, amounting to £30 billion, but they never answer the question: where will the money come from?

The Opposition have made one or two interesting commitments. They pledged that income tax rates would not rise under Labour, but that did not fully convince a sceptic electorate, so they made a new pledge that the Government's public expenditure plans would remain in place for the next two years. The fact that they consistently voted against them has been swept to one side. They are now committed to the levels of departmental expenditure set out in the Red Book, with the exception of the deputy leader of the Labour party who does not know the basic rates of tax, but has probably been briefed by the shadow Chief Secretary.

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

The position is quite incredible. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer pointed out, there is a £12 billion black hole in Labour's expenditure plans. If the Opposition retain our figures, they will have to carry out the reforms that we have factored in and allowed for in preparing the Red Book figures. Their reaction last month to our proposed privatisation of London Underground suggests that new Labour's late conversion to Tory policies still does not embrace privatisation, despite the evidence of the past 15 years. Will the deputy leader of the Labour party confirm that a Labour Government would proceed with the privatisation of the national air traffic service and the sale of other assets that would raise £1.5 billion in proceeds that are included in the Red Book figures?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Before we step off the underground, can we be told who will pay for all the repairs that are desperately needed to the crumbling tunnels of the underground?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That is a simple question to answer. The whole point of privatising the underground is to raise the funds to pay for the necessary renovations. If the underground is crumbling, how does the Labour party propose to pay for renovating it? That is the question and there can be no answer unless a Labour Government would proceed with our plans to privatise the underground and use the funds in large measure to carry out urgent repairs and improve standards, as we are determined to do.

Of course the Opposition would have to go further. Last November, they opposed our reforms of the social security system. That is a perfectly legitimate option. The shadow Secretary of State for Social Security condemned the Budget changes to bring the structure of benefits for lone parents into line with that for two-parent families. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) spoke eloquently and I have no complaint about her explanation as to why the Labour party opposed a change that would produce revenues that are factored into the Red Book figures. She said:

"This move will increase the poverty suffered by children in Britain today and will do nothing to help get lone mothers who want to work, off benefit and into work."

That is a clear statement of the hon. Lady's position on the policies included in the Red Book.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has generously asked the hon. Lady many times to clarify her position. He wrote to her and her reply had only one point of major interest: it completely avoided the question. However, the proposal would raise £60 million.

Labour has also opposed our proposals in respect of the private finance initiative in the national health service. The hon. Member for Peckham, keeping at it, voiced new Labour's approach to all the modernisation and described it as

"The latest scheme for privatising the NHS, more accurately called the privatisation initiative."

She appeared to show a sad misunderstanding of the PFI and Labour support for it. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East has claimed that he invented the whole idea some years ago.

Mr. Prescott: It is in Cabinet papers. The right hon. Gentleman discussed it and gave it the name "the Prescott option".

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am giving the right hon. Gentleman some credit. He should be proud of it.

What emerged from the hon. Lady's approach is that, deep down, Labour has a gut detestation of anything that involves a relationship with the private sector. She also drew attention to another cost in Labour's plans. According to the Red Book estimates for the Department of Health, nearly £500 million over the next two financial years involves PFI. If Labour is in favour of it I understand that, but if it regards it as some hideous Tory innovation, how would a future Labour Government be able to accept our public expenditure figures?

The Opposition do not speak with one voice on the subject. The hon. Lady might have done well to speak to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). As one would expect, he received high praise from the shadow Chief Secretary, who described his ideas as follows:

"An imaginative use of the public-private partnership has been suggested by David Blunkett to tackle the £3.25 billion school repair backlog."

Let us consider what happens when imagination gets hold of public finances. The hon. Member for Brightside envisaged local authority schools borrowing from the private sector—from the banks—to increase capital spending on schools. The problem is that such borrowing by local education authority schools would count as public expenditure. If it continued for 10 years, it would add another £320 million a year to the costs not accounted for in the Red Book.

Labour's policies are littered with such mistakes. Let me use the example of local authority receipts for house building and the extension of student loans. Labour has set out plans for student loans, but its proposals would make sure that the loans were included within the definition of public expenditure. That would lead to an increase in expenditure of £950 million a year.

Perhaps the biggest and bravest of all the announcements is that which centres on the phased release of local authorities' capital receipts. If the capital receipts that are there were released over five years, they would amount to about £2.6 billion a year. I will not inflict my views on the House; I will give the views of *The Economist*, which said:

"This is a piece of creative accounting which lets Labour pretend that allowing councils to spend money they have raised selling homes will cost nothing. In fact, if they spent this money, councils would no longer have it to cut debt, and would have to borrow more on the market."

That is a wholly independent and accurate assessment of the position.

The first problem with the proposal is that it actually adds to public expenditure. That is only the start, however. Where are these capital receipts? They are all in the wrong places. Inner cities would not benefit very much. Thirty-six councils have no capital receipts to

release. Although it could be argued that there is plenty of need in Birmingham, there is not a penny to be released there. There is bad news for the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), and the cupboard is bare in Hackney, Newham and Southwark.

There are, of course, receipts to come in some areas—the prosperous suburbs. That is very convenient for the Labour party, but not, of course, for new Labour. This is old Labour: this is Herbert Morrison. This is called building out into the Tory marginal constituencies. Releasing receipts where the receipts actually are serves a new political purpose—not a social purpose, or an economic purpose. On the assumption that it costs £40,000 to build a council house, Crawley will have 2,200 new council houses, Newbury 1,600, Bromley 1,500, Surrey 1,300, and Malvern Hills and West Dorset 1,000 each. The policy and the targets are wrong.

That leads me to the new panacea. Labour calls it a windfall tax. Perhaps we have been a bit slow: it is not a windfall tax at all, but a tax on jobs, savings and pensioners. I cannot say how much it will be, because Labour will not tell us, and will not tell us which company will be taxed and when. Whenever the tax comes, however, it will affect pensioners, savings, jobs and investment. There is no such thing as a cost-free tax, plucked out of the air without doing any damage.

The fact is that Labour is blithely uninterested in the effect of this latest tax on gas, electricity and water prices, jobs, consumers, pensioners and shareholders. What a dramatic contrast that is with the policies that we introduced so painfully in order to achieve the dramatic results that the country is now enjoying. Today, we have the conditions that are right for businesses to thrive, for investment and for the creation of real jobs. The figures are as eloquent as one could possibly ask. There are 1 million more small businesses than there were in 1979, and we have the lion's share of all the inward investment coming into Europe. There has been a remarkable and continuing fall in the claimant count of unemployed people over the past four years. We have viable businesses, proper jobs and the best outlook for the country for a generation. What is the Labour party offering?

Let us look at what Labour is offering in a bit more detail. It is offering three new policies. There is a programme for the young unemployed, of which the main elements are a job subsidy for the long-term unemployed and the abolition of the 16-hour rule. I confess at once: we all know that it is perfectly possible to pay employers to offer temporary jobs to the unemployed. That is what used to happen in the 1970s. In the nationalised industries, subsidy after subsidy was paid to loss-making companies such as British Leyland and British Steel to keep them afloat, and to enable them to employ more people than the market justified. That was madness then, and it would be madness to revert to it now. Paying billions of pounds in subsidies to employers to take people off benefit for a couple of years, parcelling them up into some new parallel, artificial economy, is retrograde, and would destroy British competitiveness.

Such action is also foolish. What happens when the money runs out? Money has been taken from the utilities and—let us assume that Labour's case is right—new employment for those affected has been created for a short time. The money, however, is supposed to be a one-off—a windfall. What happens when those who have taken it must face the fact that they have used it? The cycle begins all over again. Where will the new subsidies come from? From the employers, who then say, "We can no longer afford to employ the people whom you have been subsidising"? Will there be another one-off levy on some other sector of the economy that happens to be doing well, or happens to have offended against the ideology of the Labour party? All the young people will be back where they started—back on the dole.

Let us be clear. Labour's policies start by reducing overall demand in the economy. Labour will take money from the utilities, take money by means of the minimum wage, take money from the social chapter, and use it in part to subsidise 250,000 young people. There will be higher taxes, no extra demand, but 250,000 more young people in jobs. What will happen to those whose jobs the young people take, who are displaced because subsidised labour are available to do the work more cheaply for the employer than those currently employed in the companies that would take the young people on? There is no answer to that question. There will be no higher demand in the economy, just a switch from people who are now employed at market rates to a group who are temporarily employed at subsidised rates.

It is not good enough for the state to shovel people en masse into employment, and simply hope that it will be all right on the night. It does not work. We have proved that time and again, and I cannot say how strongly our experience justifies our indignation at Labour's policy. We have been more successful in rebuilding our urban areas in the renaissance of the great towns and cities of this country, and drawing jobs, opportunities and wealth back into those areas, than any other Government in modern times. That can be done only by changing the climate, so that it is attractive to those who can afford to invest—those who can make the choice, and live, build or buy their homes and create jobs in such areas. That is the way in which it must be done, and we have shown throughout urban England and the rest of the United Kingdom how successful it has been.

We shall build on all that. We are already doing so, with the single regeneration budget, city challenge and a range of partnerships between the public and private sectors, which have never been seen in this country during this century. That is a remarkable tribute to the Government's policies. What is Labour going to do? It is not just about some cosy gesture to try to buy a quarter of a million votes from young people; it is much worse than that. Labour's policies for the urban areas—the stress areas—are all about destroying the climate of opportunity: the job-creating opportunities on which those areas depend. Let us take the destruction of the grammar schools. We all saw what happened.

Mr. Prescott: You closed 400.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that he will keep the grammar schools open? Is he saying that?

If anyone wants to know why we have a vicious circle of decline in the most stressed areas of the country, it is because the Labour party's social engineering persuaded any parent who could exercise choice to leave those areas and move to the leafy suburbs where the comprehensives were just as socially polarised as the old grammar schools

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

and secondary modern schools were. Hon. Members should not ask me whether that is right or wrong; they should ask the leader of the Labour party, who did exactly the same. He could afford to choose. He did not care about the rancid Labour local authority that he had left behind, with some of the worst levels of performance in factor after factor. He turned his back on it, just like hundreds of thousands of middle-class families have done, leaving stress and a vicious circle of decline. The Tories came riding to the rescue of those declining areas with policies designed—

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): This is a hustings speech.

The Deputy Prime Minister: These are the hustings—let us have no illusion about it. As I have said before, "You have heard nothing yet."

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Turn round.

The Deputy Prime Minister: If the hon. Lady wants it full frontal, she is very welcome.

What is the way out for the Labour party? It has said that there will be no increase in direct tax rates. It has said that it will stick to the Red Book, but it is so screwed to the floorboards by that commitment that it cannot meet its genuine ambitions. The shadow Chancellor has therefore come up with the oldest trick in the world. He is going to audit the books. There has never been a new, amateur chairman for the most browbeaten company who did not say when taking over the job of the outgoing chairman, "I am going to open the books and have an audit." Five minutes later, he sucks his teeth and says, "Oh, I never knew how bad it is. I can't believe it is that bad. They never told me. They never warned me."

The fact is that the books are open. We have not had to change our policies once we have set the public expenditure figure. Year after year, the only reason for changing policies is if one wants to cut something or raise more taxes. The excuse will be to try to blame the outgoing Government. That is as stark a threat as any that could be conceived. We stick to our policies and our Red Book forecasts, and there is no need for a new Budget at any time in the next 12 months.

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East is sometimes helpful, but he should try a little harder. He has said:

"Labour would be absolutely stupid"—

Has the House got that?—

"to give any indication of what tax rates might be."

If I were out there trying to win power in a general election campaign and I intended to cut the rates and put taxes down, it would not be stupid to tell people. It would be sensible to let them in on the secret and share the good news. It would be stupid to tell them only if the tax rates were going to go up.

The right hon. Gentleman carried on being helpful, when he said:

"We are not prepared to make any statements about the matter of allowances and taxes, and it is quite proper for us to do so."

It may be proper for him, but unfortunately it seems improper for his colleagues. The right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) told us that there would be no increase in income tax rates. When the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) heard that, he was most helpful and he said of the shadow Chancellor:

"He was careful to exclude other forms of tax".

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): National insurance.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have not come to that one yet. The hon. Member for Oldham, West continued:

"There is capital gains tax, inheritance tax and all the allowances and the share option schemes. So it isn't quite as bleak as it seems."

Labour's deputy Chief Whip has been extremely helpful. He said:

"Gordon has made the position completely clear on the rates."

We understand that. The rates are apparently going to be fixed, but the deputy Chief Whip did not want anyone to get too depressed. He continued:

"There are something like 200 different allowances and he is not going to go through them all, setting them before coming into Government. He has got to have some room for manoeuvre."

That is what he said.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will not give way, because I have only one more point to make. The country has been clearly warned by the Government and it has been warned by independent commentators, but last night, Lord Barnett added his voice and his experience, as a former Chief Secretary in a Labour Government. He has been through it. He has lived through the experience and he knows what the Labour party is all about. When he warns the country that he does not believe that another Labour Government could stick to the tax levels and achieve their policies, I tell the country, "Listen, before it is too late."

5.34 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): The Deputy Prime Minister made it clear what this debate and the series of Adjournment debates initiated by the Government are about. They are the hustings and the preparation for a general election. Presumably, that is why he spent so little time talking about the Government's record and so much on the Opposition's case. We will enter the debate, because public expenditure is important.

We thank the Government for the third Opposition debate that they have initiated, following the debates on the windfall levy—which the Deputy Prime Minister mentioned—and on constitutional reform. We are debating public expenditure now, and I understand that we shall have a debate on pensions next week. All those critically important issues will be at the heart of the political debate up to the general election. Therefore, it is right and proper to have those debates in the House.

While it is good practice to have the debates and rehearse our election arguments, I am not sure that it is a good practice for the Deputy Prime Minister, in view of

the Government's record. Given their record on taxation, it was a bit much for the Deputy Prime Minister to talk about cons in relation to the Opposition's proposals. The Prime Minister and the then Chancellor said in 1992 that they did not want to see VAT increased or to increase the overall burden of taxation. I will not give the exact quotations, but I have them here.

Those commitments were given at the time of the election in 1992, and if anyone was conned, the electorate were conned by the Government's statements on taxation. We have seen 22 increases in taxation and an increase in VAT, even though the Government promised the electorate that that would not happen. They lied to the electorate, and the verdict given in the Wirral is a clear indication of how people feel about believing what Ministers say.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that one of the reasons why taxation increased, including VAT on gas and fuel, was the mistake—which has now been openly admitted—over the exchange rate mechanism. Will he and the Labour party now state that they will never enter the exchange rate mechanism, which brought such terrible tragedy to the British nation?

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, because it was the Prime Minister who said that he had no intention of devaluing or of leaving the exchange rate mechanism. The Tories were the party of non-devaluation. We were supposed to be the party of devaluation, if one listened to the Tories' rhetoric. Of course they devalued, despite all their promises, and at great cost. The cost was £15 billion, with an overall net cost of £2 billion for the taxpayer.

We have made our position clear on the single currency and the exchange rate. When the decision on the single currency has to be made, we will allow the people to make a decision. I believe that that is the Government's position, although they are divided on the issue. There are many Ministers on the Government Front Bench. The Foreign Secretary is not here, but the Secretary of State for Health is in his place. He told us that he had a confusion of thought about the matter. Clearly there are many different views in the Government and they are now paying the price with the electorate for that confusion.

Today we are debating the important subject of public expenditure. The size of public expenditure and its priorities determine security and progress in our society. Debates about those priorities are the essence of a democratic society. How we raise that money and spend it forms the basis of general elections. But the big political question is how to obtain the right balance. That is the matter to which the Deputy Prime Minister was addressing himself. He had his view of the correct balance, but the Opposition are more concerned about social justice, which is relevant to the arguments on a minimum wage. There are clear differences between us.

Eighteen years of a Tory Government have thrown the public finances into turmoil. We are not yet sure of the full extent of that turmoil and whether we are out of the woods. This year the public sector borrowing requirement is £26 billion, and the party that considers itself to be the guardian of the national debt has doubled it since 1990. Those are not my figures: they are the results of the Government's public expenditure priorities. Interest payments on that debt alone cost each taxpayer £1,100 a year.

Not only is the nature of that expenditure a matter for concern, but we have witnessed its terrible cost to our communities in the breakdown of social cohesion. We are clearly not a nation at ease with itself, although that might have been one of the declared aims in the early stages of the Government. It is a matter of fact that we have a record level of homelessness, that education and health standards have declined and that crime has doubled. *[Interruption.]* That is not in doubt, is it? I can understand that hon. Members do not want to believe such figures, but they are Government figures which I want to use for the purposes of this debate.

Poverty has doubled and there is mass unemployment in Britain today. *[Interruption.]* More than 1 million is mass unemployment, 2 million is worse and 3 million—the Government's record—is an indictment of a Government who say that they are concerned about unemployment. Mass unemployment is millions out of work, which has been the Government's record in their 18 years in office. I am astounded that, despite all their fiddling of the figures, the Government cannot accept that what we have today is still mass unemployment however it is defined.

That mass unemployment has caused massive problems in the public finances because of the cost of welfare expenditure, unemployment pay and social security payments. That is why we have difficulties in our public finances today. They are not the result of economic success, but the result of the failure to achieve the kind of economic growth and prosperity that could result in lower unemployment.

The Labour party's argument is that after 18 years there can be no excuses, no blaming a Labour Government of 1979. What we are asked to judge today is the Government's record. The responsibility lies fairly and squarely with this Tory Government.

This week we have had vivid reminders of the importance of public expenditure. What is important is not just how much is spent but how wisely and how fairly it is spent. Today we have seen in the newspapers alone issues that considerably affect public expenditure and reflect the Government's priorities.

I take as one small example Gulf war syndrome, which was clearly due to public expenditure on insecticides to protect our soldiers. *[Interruption.]* Yes, that was the judgment at that time, although the truth of the matter has been concealed by the Ministry of Defence. But the Government's treatment of those soldiers has been influenced more by the public expenditure consideration of the cost of compensation for the victims of Gulf war syndrome than by a judgment of what is fair. *[Interruption.]* Yes, that is at the heart of it.

We have debated in the House the beef scandal, about which we have heard more this afternoon. We put some of the blame for that on the Government's deregulation policy. That beef crisis alone has cost us £3.5 billion of public expenditure.

The Deputy Prime Minister also referred to local government finances. The Government's treatment of local authority finances has been deplorable. The Government have shifted the financial burden of public expenditure on to local authorities. In 1979 the

[Mr. Prescott]

Government carried 61 per cent. of that cost; today it is 52 per cent. The real effect of that on people's lives has been to force up the council tax and threaten local services. Moreover, the share-out between the councils has lacked any consideration of fairness. If the Government had given every council the same grant per head as Westminster, 94 per cent. of councils would be charging no council tax. That has more to do with party political considerations than social justice.

That is the issue, and it goes a long way to explaining why the number of councils under Tory control has gone down from 235 in 1979 to 13 now. That is the result of decisions taken by the electorate. I presume that the electorate made their judgment on the basis of the Government's role in providing their local services. So definite was their rejection of the Government at national and local level that the Tories now control only 13 councils, allowing the Liberal Democrats to claim that they are second in local authority representation.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North–West): Did the hon. Gentleman notice a leader in *The Independent* last week attacking Labour-controlled local government for spending unwisely? Is he aware that council tax payers in Leeds not only face a doubling of the rate of council tax, but the city's debt is now so huge that it costs more than £60 million—the cost of the royal yacht—each and every year in Leeds? Let us have none of that fiction from the Opposition. That is the reality of Labour in power.

Mr. Prescott: I assume that the Government would not want to put forward their record on the national debt. The Government have been responsible for a worse increase in the national debt than any local authority has in its debt. *[Interruption.]* That is true and I am quite prepared to defend that statement. Not every local authority is perfect. There are not many Tory-controlled local authorities about which to make judgments. One remaining one is Westminster, but I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would like me to compare Westminster's record with many other local authorities.

Some local authorities are good and some bad, and that is not necessarily a matter of their political control. Some can be efficient and some inefficient. That is the nature of it. I am not concerned with whether some are efficient and some less efficient, or whether that is related to their political control; my argument is that the Government have made it much more difficult to deliver services in the local authority areas as a result of Government changes in public expenditure to deal with the debts resulting from their policies.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. William Waldegrave): I thought that I heard the right hon. Gentleman say that the Labour Government had a better record than the Conservatives on the national debt. The national debt in the Conservative Government's worst year was better than that in the Labour Government's best year. Had the level of borrowing under the Labour Government continued, the national debt would now be just about exactly twice what it currently is.

Mr. Prescott: I did not say that. *[Interruption.]* I did not. The point is a fair one. The Chief Secretary is talking about the debt under different periods of government. Debts are related to receipts, and in the period to which the right hon. Gentleman refers, there were considerable receipts from oil and privatisation. Had the Labour Government had such receipts, they would not have had to borrow. Therefore, as usual, the Chief Secretary tells only half the story which, as we all know, is consistent with his record.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: Let me make some more points. I have been giving way to hon. Members.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley) *rose—*

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley) *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: Let me make some progress. *[Interruption.]* What has the other manager of the Tory party, the Minister without Portfolio, got to say? I will give way to him if he wants. Does he want to speak? No. Clearly, the Deputy Prime Minister is in control; that has decided it once and for all.

When the Deputy Prime Minister was talking about the pension proposals, which the House will have an opportunity to debate next week, I thought that it was a bit much when he said that the Government's projection was for savings of £40 billion by the year 2040. The Government cannot get their projections right over two or three years. How can the right hon. Gentleman come to the House and offer us a projection about public expenditure savings of £40 billion by 2040? The record is clearly against him when he makes such projections. I shall come to some of the evidence in a moment. First, let us examine the other projections that have been made by the Chancellor and the Government, because they are relevant.

I will take no lectures from Tory Governments about pensions. They are the ones who divorced pensions from earnings—*[Interruption.]* I am talking about the Government's record. They are the ones who broke the link with earnings. Between 1945 and 1950, Labour brought in the first universal pensions scheme of the kind that we have today. The state earnings-related pension scheme, too, was introduced by a Labour Government. We were the people who established decent pension provision within a welfare system, under a Labour Government. The record of the Conservative Government has always been to undermine the pensioners in this country. That is clear.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: I want to finish this point. When we established the Borrie commission, the Government made it clear that they were critical of Labour's discussions about the problems facing the funding of pensions. We were attacked for suggesting the possibility that SERPS might be changed. The Government's accusation was that there would be no SERPS in the proposals. Yet it is the Government who have done the U-turn, and are about to ditch not only SERPS but the right to a basic state pension. The Government have always attacked the rights of pensioners, and they are continuing to do so.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): The right hon. Gentleman has attacked the Government for

bringing to an end the link between average earnings and the old-age pension. Does he mean that a Labour Government would restore that link? If a Labour Government would have no such intention, is it not pretty shoddy and hypocritical to imply that they would?

Mr. Prescott: It is a fact of life that the Conservatives made that break—and every Conservative Member voted for it. Make no mistake, we have not made a commitment to restore the link. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] No, because, as hon. Members will hear from me, we have decided our priorities for public expenditure and taxation, and the electorate can make a judgment on them.

After 18 years, there are so many things that the Government have undermined. The same point can be made about the health service, prescription charges, and charges for spectacles and teeth. The Government have constantly put a health tax on the people of this country. We could not possibly hope to reverse all the damage that they have done in 18 years. All that we can do is to present to the electorate our priorities for public expenditure and tax, as we are doing now.

Mr. Davies *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: I have not finished on pensions yet.

When the Government decided to make the first attack on SERPS and allow people to contract out into private pension schemes, it cost us billions of pounds to subsidise the transfer from the public into the private sector. Nearly 3 million pension holders were denied a proper pension because the value of their pensions was reduced. The private sector—

Mr. Davies *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: Wait a minute.

The private sector totally failed the pensioners, and the taxpayer paid the price for it. That is always the case with the Tories on pensions.

Mr. Davies: Why criticise the Government for breaking the link between earnings and pensions if the Labour party has no intention of restoring that link? Is that not a thoroughly deceptive way in which to conduct an election campaign?

Mr. Prescott: It is still a fact that the Conservatives broke the link. *[Interruption.]* We shall have a debate in the House about it next week. The Government have set down a day for a debate on the pensions system, and that is the proper time to discuss it. I simply make the point that, again, public expenditure was involved in another pension fraud by the Government—and now they propose to put even more of our pensions into the private sector, which totally failed the people who were conned into transferring from public into private pension schemes last time. What motivates the Government to propose changes in pensions? As I have tried to point out, it is certainly not a desire to protect pensioners. History is clearly against the Government, and the taxpayer always ends up paying the bill.

The Deputy Prime Minister made certain statements about what savings would be made in public expenditure—the subject of the debate—by the year 2040, but the Government's record on forecasting and on managing the public coffers is a classic case of incompetence: I do not know how else it can be described. The Government say that they can save £40 billion in 50 years' time, but let us look at their projection record over shorter periods for the borrowing requirements arising out of their public expenditure programme. In 1993 the Government said that the borrowing requirement would be £32 billion; it was actually £45 billion. In 1994 they said that it would be £25 billion; in fact it was £36 billion. In 1995 they said that it would be £19 billion; it was £32 billion. This year it was supposed to be £6 billion, but in fact it is £26 billion.

The Government's sums have been about £60 billion out over just three or four years and those mistakes amount to more than the £40 billion that the Deputy Prime Minister projected would be saved in 50 years' time. He cannot even get his sums right over four or five years, so who could believe anything that a Minister in the present Government says on the subject?

With such a bill, we can see why the national debt has doubled. In 1992 the Government misled the public about the true state of the public finances, and certainly misled them on taxes. It is no wonder that the public in general, and the electorate in Wirral in particular, have lost faith in them, as we saw in the by-election last Thursday.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: No, I want to make some progress. I have given way to several hon. Members.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham) *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: I never give way to that hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Arnold *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman will not be here much longer.

We have heard lots of talk about a successful economy. But despite all that talk, which we heard yet again from the Deputy Prime Minister today, the past 18 years have not been as successful as he claims. In the Budget debate, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury attacked what he called the European social model. The right hon. Gentleman's idea of the countries that could be considered part of that model was a bit limited. Nevertheless, I believe that the European social model in the post-war period, to its credit, was the most successful economic model that we have witnessed in any developed economy—successful in growth, in investment and in prosperity, while at the same time securing full employment and social justice. That is to the eternal credit of a European social model that was managed both by the left and by the right. It was not a socialist creation: it was managed by Governments of all political parties, and it secured full employment and social justice.

Mr. Waldegrave: The right hon. Gentleman is making a serious and correct point. When the Germans, in particular, followed the economic advice of Ludwig Erhard, which nowadays would be called Thatcherism, they did extremely well.

Mr. Prescott: The right hon. Gentleman could also look to other European social models under socialist

[Mr. Prescott]

direction, which were equally successful in the development of their economies. The point that I am making is that that model saw a role for Government that accepted responsibility both for full employment and for dealing with the problems of inflation. The creation of wealth marched alongside social justice, whether the Government were German, Swedish or Danish. Throughout Europe the model was successful.

Of course there are great difficulties for that model at the moment. *[Interruption.]* I am trying to make a point about that. At the heart of the argument, as with Keynes, is the amount of money that is put into the economy and into public expenditure. What might have been all right in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s is in grave difficulties in the 1990s, with a different global economy and all sorts of other factors that are changing.

It is important for us to recognise that fact, because the restraints that affect our public expenditure are considerable when one seeks to balance inflation, employment, borrowing and public expenditure. That is the problem for all Governments today, and I concede that it has changed. However, that model was far more successful than the competitive pre-war model that gave us mass unemployment and great poverty. The deregulated model that the Government are beginning to develop carries with it mass unemployment on a scale associated with the pre-war period.

That argument will go on between us. We are debating the role of public expenditure. I have no doubt that public expenditure—the total amount of it and its quality—can affect prosperity and levels of employment and has some relationship to economic activity in the country.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): The right hon. Gentleman complains about the national debt. Is he aware that the entire western world is even now just recovering from the worst economic recession since 1929? I trust that even he does not seek to lay the blame for that at the door of the British Government. Yes, it has been necessary to borrow, but does the right hon. Gentleman accept that it has been possible only because we paid off most of the national debt during the early years of the Conservative Government?

Mr. Prescott: That is confusing. During three years of apparently successful growth, we have been borrowing more heavily. In the cycle of decline and expansion, a country usually borrows less when it is growing faster. Why has the debt increased at what is claimed to be a time of great growth?

All world economies are faced with considerable debt. In a global economy, there are billions flooding around. There are real problems in dealing with that kind of flexibility. Time and again—

Mr. Booth *rose—*

Mr. Riddick *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: No; I want to make some progress.

Time and again, we hear from the Tories that the British economy has outperformed other European models. The argument is that we have discovered the ideal model, which is far better than the European social model. I recognise that there are difficulties for which we have to make some adjustments.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I hope that it is a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Fabricant: It is, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like some clarification. I notice that while the deputy leader of the Labour party is talking about the European social model, only half a dozen Labour Back Benchers—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fabricant: Are we quorate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That has nothing to do with the Chair.

Mr. Fabricant: I thought that we might not be quorate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Prescott: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not losing his hair in this debate.

I should like to deal with the argument that somehow Britain has produced an economic model that is leading the way and is better than what we see in the European economy. I took the trouble to look at some of the figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Eurostat, the House of Commons Library and parliamentary answers. In the latest European prosperity league, we are ninth out of 15. Our growth rate since 1979 puts us 13th out of 15. On investment, we are 15th out of 15. On inflation—the issue on which the Government make considerable claims—the United Kingdom lies 11th out of 15. On long-term interest rates, we are 11th out of 15. Our record on unemployment since 1979 puts us ninth out of 15. On those six key economic indicators, the UK remains in the bottom half, if not the relegation zone.

Those statistics do not reflect the success of the British model. The Government have failed on so many counts that they should withdraw Chris Woodhead from the schools and send the Office for Standards in Education inspectors into the Tory Cabinet to look at its competence. That is what happens in education to those at the bottom of the league.

If Conservative Members do not like those foreign figures, we can draw on the evidence of the Deputy Prime Minister's competitiveness White Paper. It shows that on purchasing power parities, we have fallen from 13th to 16th in the world prosperity league. Those are the Government's figures. That is a great boast. The Government somehow claim that in 18 years we have produced a successful British model and have the audacity to tell the rest of the world to follow it.

Mr. Riddick: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: No, I must make progress. I am already behind time.

Stability is important in modern economies. We all agree that the cycle of boom and bust damages the economy. We have had two deep recessions during the Government's period of office. The February edition of the Lloyds bank economic bulletin says that

"since 1980, the UK has the worst record for economic stability amongst the 14 largest industrial countries."

That seems to be a pretty damning indictment of a Government from a bank that is not anti-Tory. The Tories have had 18 years to put the economy on an even keel. The record is not as given to us by the Deputy Prime Minister.

The one thing that the Tories might claim to have increased is exports. The audacity of that claim is that exports have increased since they devalued the economy. The Prime Minister said:

"The devaluer's option would be a betrayal of our future and it is not the Government's policy."

He called it a soft option. That seemed like a pretty clear policy. Did he con people when he said that the Conservatives would not devalue? Within days of that promise, he devalued the pound. Exports went up, but so did imports, because we did not have the capacity to deal with the demand that came from devaluation. We were taken to the bottom of the trade deficit league, with the exception of Spain. Does the Chief Secretary disagree? No. Okay. However one measures them, the Tories' claims for the economy are far from proven and their policies have been expensive for the taxpayer. The devaluation cost something like £2 billion.

The Government make another great claim on unemployment. I hear Conservative Members making it, as though they can live with this country's levels of unemployment and think that that is a success. They took it to 3 million from 1 million and then brought it down to 1.5 million and claimed great success. Even on their projections, apparently we shall still have 1.6 million unemployed by the year 2000. Presumably they are not attempting to get anywhere near the record of a Labour Government if they are elected for a fifth term.

Mr. Waldegrave: Will the right hon. Gentleman remind us who said that any fool knows that if we have a minimum wage there will be a shake-out of jobs?

Mr. Prescott: I will come to the minimum wage, but I made the quote. *[Interruption.]* I made the quote.

The Minister without Portfolio (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): You said it.

Mr. Prescott: Did the right hon. Gentleman not hear? "I" means me. I know that he may be getting confused, but "I" means me, John Prescott.

I should like to deal with unemployment first. I promise to come to the minimum wage. Of course we welcome people being able to get a job. If more people have been returning to work, we welcome that. Any fool would welcome that. However, it is hard to accept the Government's claims at face value. What they say is happening to the level of unemployment is hard to determine, because we cannot believe the figures. I believe that there are lies, damned lies and Tory statistics. That is true for most areas. After 32 changes to the count, no less an authority than the Royal Statistical Society has said:

"The claimant count cannot be trusted."

Why should the public believe in figures that even Tory Ministers do not believe in?

Everybody knows that, as employment spokesman, I constantly attacked the figures and whether they could be believed. I offered to agree with the Government on putting some honesty back into the figures. Some changes were made, but even the figures now produced by the Government cannot be believed. The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment made it clear when the most recent figures were announced that we could not believe half of them because of the special reasons that he gave. The employment figures and the level of unemployment are not as Ministers tell us. Apparently, Ministers feel moved to make it clear that we cannot believe the figures that are given. The Minister said:

"The nearest we can come to is that about half these figures we are giving each month are genuine."

The Minister is saying that we should not believe the unemployment figures. I rest my case.

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): I note that the right hon. Gentleman does not believe that the unemployment figures are accurate. What changes would a Labour Government make to unemployment statistics?

Mr. Prescott: The first would be to make them honest.

Mr. Legg: What would Labour do?

Mr. Prescott: I have made a number of proposals. The Minister is saying that the Government are having to adjust the figures to project what he thinks is the real level of unemployment. I have given Ministers a number of papers on the technical details of how to make the figures more honest. My record is clear. The fact that we cannot accept the published unemployment levels is one of the problems of getting any kind of movement towards honesty.

Tory Chancellors have often committed themselves to cutting public expenditure, so why have they failed to do it? Despite all the promises through every election, they have not done it. I would be interested to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister why they have not. Did the Tories con the electorate in every election when they said that they would cut public expenditure?

Mr. Waldegrave *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: The Deputy Prime Minister can think for himself. Would he care to tell us why he did not keep that promise?

The Deputy Prime Minister: What the right hon. Gentleman is saying is not true. The level of public expenditure as a proportion of GDP is falling and it is scheduled to reach our target figure of 40 per cent. We are on target for a balanced budget by the end of the century. If there was a shadow of doubt about the validity of our figures, the Labour party would not have accepted them.

Mr. Prescott: My question is based on the Government's figures. They are the same as they were in 1979. I want to know why they promised to cut public

[Mr. Prescott]

expenditure but did not do so. I have heard that promise constantly from Tory Members, but they have not done it. I could help the Deputy Prime Minister by explaining why they have not kept their promise; they are paying out huge sums for unemployment because of the failure of their policies. It is a simple answer, but it is difficult for the Deputy Prime Minister because he keeps talking about a successful economy.

Mr. Waldegrave *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: I will not give way again. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] All right then.

Mr. Waldegrave: This is an important point and I think that the right hon. Gentleman might have misunderstood the figures. Of course the figures have a cycle, which is based on a trend. The trend was upwards until the late 1970s and it is now clearly downwards. The peak was at 47 per cent. in the 1970s, 45 per cent. in the 1980s and 43 per cent. in the 1990s. No statistician doubts that the trend is downwards.

Mr. Prescott: Targets and trends, but in reality things are no different. I believe that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is the man who told us that he wanted to achieve a figure of 35 per cent. for public expenditure. I do not know in what year he is predicting that that will be achieved, but in 18 years the Government have made no difference to the level. We have had ups and downs, but we have had ups and down in unemployment and every other economic indicator. It is called boom and slump and that is what we have seen from the Government.

The Deputy Prime Minister has talked about a black hole in the accounts and the waste of resources. Can he tell us why we are prepared to spend £450 million to privatise the railway system when, only this week, a report showed that it has cost us billions of pounds more than we have got back in receipts? Hon. Members laughed when I mentioned the railways earlier, but the reason for the high cost is that we have doubled the level of subsidy to the private sector. The Government said that that would not happen, but it is costing the taxpayer twice as much and we are paying out more than we get back in receipts. Would not it have been better to use those millions, or in some cases billions, of pounds to invest in the railway system instead of pursuing the ideology of privatisation?

The beef tax cost us £3.5 billion and the poll tax cost us £14 billion. That was a total waste of money. Many promises were made about the poll tax, but it cost us £14 billion. A total of £1.5 billion has been spent on extra bureaucracy in the health service. Those are all examples of waste.

Let me tell the Deputy Prime Minister about the minimum wage and the effect on jobs. Since I made the statement to which he referred earlier, a great deal of work has taken place in America and here which shows that my fears about higher unemployment are not true. If hon. Members want to see that research, I will send it to them.

There is another point about the minimum wage which I would have expected to concern Tory Members. I worked in kitchens as a commis chef and it was a wages council industry. I lived on wages council payments. The Government abolished the wages councils and deregulated. Despite what the Government have said, in those deregulated industries there has been a fall in wages and it has cost far more to pay for the wage subsidy needed to achieve what the Government have determined is a proper level of income. That has cost the taxpayer £3.5 billion.

Why do Tory Members not find it offensive to have to find £3.5 billion to pay to employers who hire people at rates of £1.50 an hour, telling them to nip along to the Department of Social Security to obtain the subsidy to make up their wage? The same employer under a regulated system was paying more and the taxpayer did not have to contribute. That is the hypocrisy involved in the Tories' view of the minimum wage. If they were concerned about the taxpayer, they should ask those questions.

Mr. Fabricant *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: I will not give way. I know about this because I have lived it. *[Interruption.]* All right, I will give way.

Mr. Fabricant: The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the model in the United States. He will be aware that the US model is a percentage of an average wage in the United States. That would be the equivalent of a minimum wage in the United Kingdom of about £2.50 per hour. Is that what the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting? What rate is he suggesting? That will determine the rate of unemployment.

Mr. Prescott: We have made it clear that the rate will be determined by the minimum wage commission that we will establish. *[Interruption.]* What is wrong with that? It is employers who have said that they would like to give evidence. They are concerned, as are the trade unions. We will establish a commission and when the rate is determined, we will come here and there will be a debate. We will be the Government then and you lot will be in opposition.

We see the distortion of many of Labour's plans. The Deputy Prime Minister has been talking about a Labour spending plan of £30 billion. Then, the Bill and Ben of the advertising industry announced on posters that the figure was £12 billion, but we are now back to £30 billion. I wish they would decide what the figure is. In our defence, I shall quote what was said by *The Financial Times* when we offered our rebuttal of the Tories' claims. It said that the charge that it is £30 billion is

"riddled with inconsistencies and exaggeration . . . with little or no grounding in fact."

We believe that the Tories are wrong to make such accusations about us. We wonder why the Chief Secretary to the Treasury always seems to be at the scene of the crime when these posters and pamphlets are launched. The right hon. Gentleman sometimes has to explain his position, which can be confusing, but I prefer the explanation given recently by the Secretary of State for Health. He made the mistake of talking about the Government's position on the single currency. He said that his "thought processes were blurred". That is a new approach and it could characterise many of those in the Government.

Let me make it clear that there are no hidden Labour spending plans of either £30 billion or any other figure that the Tory party chooses to claim. The real question must be about the Tory figures. The Red Book assumes that there will be £4 billion from privatisation receipts. We do not know where those receipts will come from. The only thing mentioned by the Deputy Prime Minister was air traffic control.

Mr. Waldegrave *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: Wait a second. I assume that the Post Office is not to be included.

Mr. Waldegrave *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: I will give way because I cannot have the right hon. Gentleman scratching his head any more.

Mr. Waldegrave: The right hon. Gentleman has obviously not read the Red Book. The first £2.5 billion comes from the second-tranche sales of Railtrack. Even if the Labour party was in office, it would get that sum. There is £1.5 billion next year of which £500 million is predicted to come from the national air traffic service. If the right hon. Gentleman was in power, would he sell NATS?

Mr. Prescott: No—*[Interruption.]* Wait a minute. There is no doubt that the receipts from past privatisations will be part of our Treasury. Judgments about any further revenue from privatisations will be made at the appropriate time. Is the Post Office to be part of the privatisation receipts? I assume that the answer is no.

The Deputy Prime Minister *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Prescott: Okay. Is the privatisation of London Underground to be part of the receipts? There is £2 billion involved in that. Are we right to assume that the money raised in the sale of London Underground will be used for investment? That is what was said in a letter from the Secretary of State for Transport to the Prime Minister. Is that correct?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman knows that the answers to those questions have already been provided. The London Underground receipts, and any policy consequences of the Royal Mail, are not included in the Red Book figures, but it is clear that significant figures are included—£1.5 billion—so the right hon. Gentleman must either privatise or find the money somewhere else. It is apparent from his speech that he has not the first idea which is the answer.

Mr. Prescott: It is not absolutely clear where all the receipts will come from. No doubt that will be part of the debate in the election.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. Friend might like to know that there is some confusion on the Government Benches. I have just received an answer from the Minister for Transport in London. I asked:

"if he will list the total amount payable to Her Majesty's Government for the sale of Railfreight Distribution."

The answer reads:

"The British Railways Board has yet to finalise the sale of Railfreight Distribution."

Another answer on another specific case reads:

"I will answer these questions shortly."

Far from the confusion being on our side, the real problem is that the people who are selling the assets have no idea what they will get for them.

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. The Secretary of State for Transport, in his letter to the Prime Minister, was concerned about whether the money was to go to the Treasury or to his Department, or to be used for investment; that was the heart of the letter, and we shall watch any developments with interest.

Usually the Government take the line that the private finance initiative principle should be extended. We have all discussed the PFI, but the Government have not been very successful in implementing it, and certainly not on the scale that they envisaged. As I understand it, the financial agreement for the hospital that was announced at the last Budget—we were promised one every month at the time of the Budget before last—has not yet been completed. Perhaps the Chief Secretary can tell us whether the financial agreement for the first hospital has been completed.

Mr. Waldegrave: I believe that the process leading to a successful conclusion is imminent, and I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will welcome it. Let me put the question back to him: is he in favour of the PFI in the health service? The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is not, and has said that it is privatisation. The PFI cannot take capital projects into the private sector unless there is a transfer of management control. As I understand it, the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury have both ruled that out.

Mr. Prescott: It is clear that, while there are ups and downs and targets, the target to which I referred has not been achieved. The Tories promised at the Budget before last that there would be a hospital every month under the PFI; by the last Budget there had not been one; it was then announced that the agreement had been signed that day; and now we are told that it has not been completed, so we know that it was just a charade and a con.

We have always made it clear that the PFI in the health sector is more concerned with capital and buildings than with clinical services. The Chief Secretary knows the arguments well.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hospital to which the right hon. Gentleman refers is the one that will serve my constituents. I can assure him that the contract has been signed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is nothing to do with the Chair.

Mr. Prescott: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has nothing to do with the hon. Gentleman's hospital either: it was in Norwich. The hospital announced by the

[Mr. Prescott]

Chancellor has still not been completed, and people wait in beds in the alleyways because of the inadequacies to which I was referring.

I have been a fan of the private finance initiative, because it was helpful to use capital investment by private funds in public industries when they were nationalised. I advocated it for quite a time, but it was *The Economist* that described the inadequacies of the PFI programme implemented by the Government as "a dog's breakfast". The programme has failed to get the important resources from the private into the public sector.

I will pray something else in aid of the PFI. The Chief Secretary must know that in 1994 the Government, led by the Deputy Prime Minister, tried to privatise the Post Office. We ran an effective campaign against that privatisation and the public made it clear that they did not want it.

In November 1994 the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster wrote to the Prime Minister about a meeting to discuss how exactly they might privatise the Post Office. They had various options before them, one of which, "the BP option", was to allow the Government to have shares in a company and let it borrow privately. The second option was called "the Prescott option". That is an interesting name for an option on a Cabinet paper. I bet not many people around the table wanted to put their hands up to vote for that. However, the minute makes it clear that quite a few were in favour of it.

The minute says:

"'the Prescott option' would be to allow the Post Office the sort of commercial freedoms proposed by the Opposition, while retaining its full public ownership. This could be achieved without legislation."

Why did the Government reject it? The minute says:

"many colleagues took the view that 'the Prescott option' would seriously undermine our whole approach to privatisation in the past and in the future: no-one was prepared to argue strongly in its favour."

They were not prepared to accept that a publicly owned industry could borrow privately, but it was only their stupidity about privatisation and Treasury rules that prevented it.

The idea is not unique: British Airways did exactly the same thing when the Deputy Prime Minister was Secretary of State for Transport. The Government haul out different rules for different industries. There is no reason why the Prescott option could not have been accepted.

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: No, I want to make this point.

If the Government's option is no longer to privatise the Post Office, there must be another option. Does that mean that the public sector Post Office can now borrow privately? That was the Prescott option, and if that is what the Government intend to do, it is an interesting comment on what they said last week—that if the public vote Blair, they will get Prescott. Now, if they vote Major, they get the Prescott option on the Post Office anyway.

My proposal is now in a Tory party manifesto. Is that the Government's intention? If so, they could have done that for every public sector industry, creating greater investment and more jobs and improving public services. Their failure to do so exposes their ideological obsession with selling off assets at great profit to their people in the City, at the direct expense of the taxpayer and at some cost to public expenditure. That is the charge that we lay against them. The Deputy Prime Minister does not seem prepared to give us an inkling of what the formula for the Post Office will be.

The Deputy Prime Minister: There are 20,000 post offices in the country and 19,000 of them are in private ownership.

Mr. Prescott: Presumably the right hon. Gentleman means that a publicly owned company is a plc—a public limited company. It is still publicly owned, is it not?

The Deputy Prime Minister: There are 20,000 post offices in the country and 19,000 of them are in private ownership. That is nothing to do with the Government.

Mr. Prescott: The right hon. Gentleman understands the point that I am trying to make. The Cabinet discussion was not about corner-shop post offices, for God's sake; it was about the Royal Mail and the Post Office as we know it and about how services can be guaranteed and expanded. That is clear in people's minds.

We agree that the Government can get a proportion of the necessary funds from private finances and we have made it clear that a Labour Government will not increase either the basic or the top rate of income tax. With the exception of our windfall levy on privatised utilities, Labour's spending plans do not involve any extra taxation.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I heard the right hon. Gentleman saying two totally different things: first, that income tax rates would remain as they are and secondly that there would be no other increases in taxation. I want to be absolutely clear that that is what he said. As I understand it, the only pledges that have been given involve income tax rates.

Mr. Prescott: We will not increase the income tax rates, including the top rate. The Deputy Prime Minister talks about allowances and other matters, but past Chancellors, the present Chancellor and the Prime Minister have always made it clear that they do not give details of changes before a Budget. That applies as much to us as to the Chancellor and the Government.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is saying that every other tax level is up for grabs under a Labour Government.

Mr. Prescott: Let me quote the Chancellor, because this is precisely our position. He said:

"People have to wait until the final Budget judgments I make. What I am certainly not prepared to do is go for some ideological theory that at no stage from now on will we ever increase any tax. I have never served in a Government of that kind; I would never vote for any Government that said that."

That is the position of the Government, the Chancellor, and of anyone with any sense. We have made clear, and the Deputy Prime Minister was fair enough to repeat it, exactly what our position is.

Mr. French: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: No, I must wind up; I have been far too long. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Perhaps I should wind up on that point.

We have put forward our proposals, we have costed them carefully and we have indicated our priorities. We have made it clear that the release of capital receipts from the sale of council houses will provide self-financing expenditure for improving housing stock. We have said that the money allocated from the windfall levy will go on jobs and skills for 250,000 people. As soon as they take office, a Labour Government would need to audit the Treasury. The Deputy Prime Minister made great play of that, but it is only right that we should do it because we cannot believe half the figures that we have been given. It is fair to say that there should be an audit.

Mr. Waldegrave *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: I am going to go on.

The Tories tell us that spending limits can be met without raising taxes. None of our pledges requires higher taxes other than the windfall levy to create jobs. In government, we will cut out the waste, inefficiency and wrong priorities in the £300 billion Tory spending bill to meet Labour's priorities.

Mr. Waldegrave *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: No, I am going to carry on.

As a start, we will use our windfall levy on the privatised utilities to put 250,000 unemployed young people back to work. We think that that is a top priority and we intend to implement it. That will release resources to invest in education and front-line services, instead of increased public expenditure on the welfare bills of failure. Other spending plans will be paid for by re-ordering existing priorities. The bureaucracy in the health service—

Mr. Waldegrave *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: I have gone on too long. The right hon. Gentleman agreed with me when I said earlier that I would sit down.

On education, we have made it clear that we will cut class sizes to 30 for six and seven-year-olds, financed by abolition of the assisted places scheme. All those arguments were heard during the Wirral by-election. People there gave their judgment. Their message to the Government is: enough is enough and time is up. Soon the people of the whole country will judge us in a general election. What we say today will be judged in that election. This debate, called by the Government to deal with Opposition policy, will only confirm the view of most people that they have had enough of this Government and want a Labour Government to take their place.

6.32 pm

Mr. David Hunt (Wirral, West): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on a brilliant speech. He set out the ingredients of a winning general election campaign. The economic figures were remarkably robust. Many of us cannot recall such consistently good economic figures for a generation. That would be thrown away if there were a change of Government. He also exposed the inadequacies of the Opposition, which were exemplified by the speech of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). We had some fun with him, particularly when he departed from the script carefully prepared for him by my long-standing friend, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson).

Now and again, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East assumed virtual reality, especially in a series of comments in which he said that, while the Government may have targets, the reality remains the same. He never sought to answer a point that fills me with anger. We may laugh at him, but what he said could be serious for the country.

The right hon. Gentleman is trying to pretend that he could walk into a position—we are not sure which—in a Labour Government, were Labour to win, and—against the background of the policies that he set out—would be able to stop the country falling into the economic ruin it fell into under the previous Labour Government. Last time, things were so bad that the Labour party then failed to win a general election for 23 years.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the Wirral by-election, but the last Wirral by-election was 21 years ago next week. Before my constituency was split into Wirral, South and Wirral, West, there was a by-election. He kept referring to the Wirral by-election, so I shall tell him what happened at it.

The country was in a serious economic mess. The Labour Government had inherited unemployment of 500,000, and trebled it to nearly 1.5 million, without tackling any of the economy's deep-seated problems. Inflation was rising fast towards 30 per cent. That was why Labour changed the link for pensioners from prices to earnings. It was done not to increase pensions, but so that pensioners would not get the increases they should have got for prices that were roaring ahead. *[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Gentleman could desist from calling me a twit—

Mr. Prescott: It was said by another hon. Member.

Mr. Hunt: I heard the right hon. Gentleman.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I think that that proves my point about the valuelessness of seated interventions.

Mr. Hunt: The fact that the right hon. Gentleman has not sought to answer a point raised during the Wirral, South by-election makes me especially angry. I remember the Wirral by-election, because I remember the state of the country at the time. However, during the Wirral, South by-election, he went on the BBC's "Close Up North" programme. He has not responded to the question that was put to him, but I am willing to give way at any stage of this analysis. His only comment in his speech in

[Mr. Hunt]

discussing free eyesight and dental tests was that Labour would present the electorate with its priorities on public expenditure. He did not seek to explain the context of his remark on television, but merely referred to Labour's public expenditure priorities.

In his last general election manifesto, the right hon. Gentleman said that he would restore free eye tests and dental checks. I am sure that the member of the audience who put the question knew the right hon. Gentleman's track record: that he had always fought for that right—not an aim, but a right, a restoration.

For the sake of accuracy, I have managed to get a transcript. I have a video of this programme, and I offer the right hon. Gentleman the opportunity to watch it. I have not found many takers for such an opportunity. I would be happy for him to see it, because he would see that his body language could have left no one in the audience in any doubt what he was saying. The audience member asked:

"Should everyone, regardless of age, have access to free eyesight and dental tests as a matter of routine?"

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East answered:

"Yes. I think it should be a right."

Not an aim, a right. He went on:

"You've got to find the money to finance it".

If I had heard the so-called deputy leader of the Labour party say on live television, "You've got to find the money to finance it," I would have concluded that he was trying to communicate to the electorate of Wirral, South that the money would be found to finance it. That would not have been an unfair analysis. I feel very angry indeed that, following that broadcast, the Labour party issued a statement saying that the right hon. Gentleman

"gave no such spending commitment: the Tories have deliberately misquoted him."

I am a devotee of the election manifesto of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East. I have a copy here. I saw him shake his head when my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister said that the right hon. Gentleman had pledged a statutory minimum wage of about £3.40 an hour. He shook his head and said no. Under the headings "Labour's Way" and "The Economy", alongside some pretty pictures—if I can describe them as such—of the right hon. Gentleman, his manifesto refers to

"a statutory minimum wage of about £3.40 an hour."

The right hon. Gentleman cannot continue to have it both ways. He promises the electorate in his manifesto and promises the electors of Wirral, South one thing, and then comes to the Dispatch Box and says the opposite. If he had wanted to make sure that the electors of Wirral, South and the people watching that television programme knew exactly the position, he could have said, "By the way, this proposal is not in our early manifesto."

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunt: No. I have said that I will give way to the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East. For the sake of the record, I should say that I noticed that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) has spent much of the debate so far trying to brief the right hon. Gentleman. I seek no apology for that, but will he excuse us if we point the finger at him when we ask who is making the policy of the Labour party, and ignore the deputy leader? We are talking about the deputy leader of the Labour party on live television making a clear commitment without qualification.

Mr. Darling: The right hon. Gentleman was a member of the Cabinet at the time of the last election. He will recall that the Conservative party had stood on an explicit platform of cutting tax year on year. He was in the Cabinet when that promise was made, and it was broken. He is in no position to lecture anyone.

Mr. Hunt: We were in a recession that had continued for longer than anyone, including the hon. Gentleman, had expected. The context of the world recession has been set out in the speeches that we have already heard. When it came to a balance between cutting NHS and education spending—crucial and critical spending—or increasing taxes, I had no hesitation in going for increasing taxes. The hon. Gentleman seeks to deflect me from my point. I will not be deflected. I shall return to it in one moment. I take pride in the fact that, although there have been tax increases to maintain and increase public expenditure on critical services such as the NHS, there have been 25 tax reductions.

Mr. Darling: Can the right hon. Gentleman refer us to the precise passage in the 1992 manifesto in which it was made clear that the pledge to reduce taxes year on year was qualified to the extent that, if it turned out that there was a recession, the pledge would not be kept?

The Conservatives knew all about the recession at the time of the last election. The Prime Minister is on record as saying the day after the election that he knew that his Government would be deeply unpopular. Where in the 1992 manifesto is there any qualification of that pledge? Is not the truth of the matter that the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues deliberately misled the British people and fought an election on tax promises which they knew they could not sustain? That is why no one trusts them, and why they lost Wirral, South.

Mr. Hunt: That is untrue and incorrect. There was no question of any such deliberate intention. I have clearly said that, when it came to a choice between cutting public expenditure and increasing taxation to maintain critical levels of spending on crucial public services, I had no hesitation in approving tax increases. Of course we had to increase taxes, in view of the background economic situation.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the significant difference is that the Government faced the realities of coping with the economy under the pressures of a world recession, whereas the Opposition have responsibility for nothing, and their policy changes from one week to the next? The only difference is that the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) has overruled the deputy leader of the Labour party.

Mr. Hunt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but it is difficult. We still have not received an answer from the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East on

the specific points that I have put to him. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central will be replying to the debate, but perhaps he could have one of his characteristic conversations with the right hon. Gentleman, and perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will give us a reply before the end of the debate.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunt: I should be happy to give way to the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, but he has not sought to intervene.

I am angry that things were said in the Wirral, South by-election that were patently untrue. I warn the right hon. Gentleman that I am carefully monitoring what electors tell me was said to them by a series of Labour Members of Parliament by telephone and on the doorstep. I have given one example, and the right hon. Gentleman has not sought to deny it. I have the transcript and the video. It is shameful that he misled the electors in that way.

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East said in his speech that there were great difficulties with the European social model at the moment. According to the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), that model will be our economic policy under a Labour Government. I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman has disclosed to the Opposition spokesman on foreign affairs that he believes that there are great difficulties with the model, but it is the model that this poor country will face if it were ever to elect a Labour Government.

There is another example of deliberate misleading. I have here a survey by Merrill Lynch entitled "UK economics: weekly perspectives". Under the heading "The Social Chapter: does it matter?", it says that the key question for Britain is whether we should have the social model or the British enterprise model, which has proved so successful. Merrill Lynch poses several questions. It says:

"supporters of membership sometimes also argue that signing the Social Chapter should have little, if any, adverse effect on the flexibility of the UK's labour market."

It says that the claim is made that

"once in, the UK can veto measures it does not support. As Mr. Blair said at the CBI, 'Each piece of legislation will be judged on its merits. I have no intention whatever of agreeing to anything and everything that emerges from the EU'".

That was from 14 November 1995.

Merrill Lynch then proceeds to analyse over several pages whether that statement by the Leader of the Opposition is true. The conclusion of that independent body is that the statement is "not true". That is a nice way of saying that someone has told an untruth. The paper says:

"Some areas of social policy are outside the Social Chapter, others are subject to majority voting. But on a series of key issues, votes are on QMV and the UK would have no veto. The UK would have to go along with the majority."

I had the privilege to serve in the Cabinet as Secretary of State for Employment, and I attended Employment Council meetings. I know the dangers of signing up to the social chapter, and I shall just give one or two examples from other countries. Indeed, their Employment Ministers used to share their frustration with me because they were subject to the following provisions of the social chapter. In Belgium, for example, all planned overtime must be notified in advance to the authorities. In Spain, overtime is limited to—

Mr. Prescott: This is not directly to do with the social chapter.

Mr. Hunt: Yes, it is.

In Spain, overtime is limited to under two hours a week, which is equivalent to 80 hours a year. In Sweden, parents are entitled to a minimum of 450 days of paid leave between them following the birth of child.

Mr. Prescott: That is nothing to do with the social chapter.

Mr. Hunt: The right hon. Gentleman may shout that from a sedentary position, but when I was Secretary of State for Employment, fighting the United Kingdom's interests in the Social Affairs Council, there was a proposal that we should introduce a parental leave regulation. The acceptance of such burdensome provisions was intended to bring us into line across Europe. I vetoed that proposal. If this country had signed up to the social chapter, I would not have been allowed to exercise that veto.

We always had informal working lunches with our opposite numbers on the Social Affairs Council, when my colleagues used to say to me, "I wish we had a veto. I wish we had the courage of the United Kingdom to stand out against the European social model." The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East admits that there are great difficulties with that model at the moment. Could he please have a word with his colleagues on the Labour Front Bench and persuade them to back off from their commitment to sign up to the social chapter? Indeed, all our partners in the European Union would like us to do that. They, too, would like to resile from the social chapter.

I have met many European partners who have told me, "If only we had the same flexible labour market as the United Kingdom. We would then see our unemployment rate coming down as it has done in the United Kingdom."

I listened to the right hon. Gentleman, and I am extremely depressed, disillusioned, and still angry. The sort of nonsense that he is peddling really means that voting Labour at the next election will mean voting people out of a job.

6.51 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Much of the debate so far has been about guessing Labour's future expenditures, but we have the facts about the Government's expenditures. After 18 years, there are a load of facts about how they have projected their expenditures, not necessarily in the interests of the country, and where they have been excessive in their expenditures and not received value for money.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) quite rightly referred to the possibility of an audit on the Treasury. When I first became Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, the Treasury suggested that it could do an efficiency audit on

[Mr. Robert Sheldon]

the National Audit Office—a move which I did not welcome. I countered that by suggesting that perhaps the NAO might first do an efficiency audit on the Treasury. We never heard anything after that.

It might be thought surprising that the Government have given a day to debate expenditure when they are so vulnerable, because the facts are there to see. I understand that an annual debate on expenditure is necessary to determine priorities and to get the views of Members. I agree with the suggestion that we should get rid of the autumn Budget, with its expenditure implications, because that presupposes that we can do a trade-off between revenue and expenditure.

We know that that has not happened, because no one outside the Government can propose increases in taxation. There is no possibility of increasing expenditures, either. One is left with a phoney debate about the relationship between income and expenditure. As a result, we have messed up the parliamentary year. The sooner we revert to a spring Budget, as suggested by my hon. Friends, the better.

I should have thought that, given the facts on the Government's expenditure, they would want to keep them quiet. They might have thought about debating that record on a Friday afternoon, approaching the summer recess, when it would not be exposed. Let us look at the record of Government expenditure. Let us not look to the future, about which very little is known, when we can consider the past and present, about which a great deal is known.

All Governments have expenditures that they have come to regret, but this is the first occasion when a day has been set aside unnecessarily just to consider certain types of expenditure that need to be questioned. First, I should like to refer to central Government net debt interest. In 1979-80, the net debt was £8 billion—I agree that that was in the then current terms—and today it stands at £24 billion. Is a leap from £8 billion to £24 billion a sensible use of public expenditure? The Government have had to spend that money because of the way in which the economy has been run. That expenditure is wholly unacceptable, and not very prudent.

The eighth report of the PAC dealt mainly with fraud and corruption. I was pleased when the then Financial Secretary, the right hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), gave a full endorsement of the report's proposals. I welcomed very much the November issue of "Regularity and Propriety", which contained everything that the PAC wished to see. It is important to note that that was wholly admirable.

It was important that the eighth report should ensure that the levels of fraud and corruption were looked at carefully, but it also drew attention to the inadequate stewardship of public money and assets. We referred to

"Failure by departments to establish effective monitoring of non-departmental public bodies which they fund and sponsor, leading to failure to detect waste and irregularities."

We referred to

"Inadequate oversight by those in authority . . . failure to ensure that delegation of responsibility is accompanied by clear lines of control and accountability, leading to the waste of large sums of public money."

We also drew attention to the

"Failure to take prompt corrective action when things begin to go wrong."

We made a blanket criticism of many of the things that had gone wrong.

Let us consider the actual detail of what has happened. I will not go back into the long distant past; I will confine myself to something rather more recent. The Pergau dam, for example, cost £234 million of public money. How was the decision made to spend that amount? Did we get value for money? We found out that an assessment of the dam was made by two people, who were sent to Malaysia to study the site on behalf of the Overseas Development Administration. They spent just two days there, and then came back and said, " It's okay." After just a two-day visit, the decision was made to spend £234 million. I am not even certain that they got to the site.

I note, of course, that that project had political overtones. One should not forget the famous note of dissent from Sir Tim Lankester, who pointed out that it represented an unreasonable expenditure of public money. That was his right, and when he came before the PAC he could claim that the fault did not lie with him because he had been overruled. We found that the path led to the Minister for Overseas Development, the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister. It then became a matter with political overtones. Nevertheless, it did not represent a good example of spending public money.

Then let us consider the Ministry of Defence's management of fire risks. The tale of the major weaknesses in its fire risk policy is almost unbelievable. In 1983, there was a conflagration at the Army store depot at Donnington, when £170 million of Government stores of various kinds went up in smoke.

The elementary fire precautions had not been taken. The PAC produced a stinging report on that failure, and received assurances that there would be improvements. Then, in 1988, another fire occurred at Donnington—the same place, the same sort of fire. There was £180 million-worth of damage this time; it was more expensive because some of the stores had been replaced, although we presume that they would not have replaced those stores that were not quite so essential.

In 1996, we looked at the problem again. There had been two fires in the same place and there had been a failure to take the obvious precautions, yet in 1996 we found that the Ministry of Defence did not even have a full record of the buildings it occupied, let alone whether they were at risk of fire. That, after 15 or 16 years of Conservative government. If the Government were really anxious about public expenditure and the control of public expenditure, they should have been looking at such matters. The Government did not lack reports—the problems did not come out of the blue—but they failed to take the action that had been recommended and strongly urged.

Let me turn now to part of the works programme for the management of the Trident programme, referring to Faslane, the Clyde base which services submarines. Construction of that base was started before the designs were completed—a risky task, which, when involving £1 billion, becomes even more serious. In 1984, the programme was expected to cost £694 million—£1.1 billion at 1994 prices. The total spent up to 1994 was, in fact, £1.9 billion—a stupendous overrun of £800 million.

Why did that happen? It happened because of inadequate management and inadequate practices. The PAC report stated that the Committee was "astonished"—a word that is rarely used by the sober members of that Committee—by the ways in which the money had been spent. The PAC is experienced in the ways of the world, but its examination led to that strong language being used. At the peak of the work, and at one time—this is unbelievable—1,000 consultants from 67 firms were employed, at a total cost of £360 million. How did people get into the base with 1,000 consultants milling around? I could not believe that money had been spent in that way, but the Committee found that it was true.

So there we see another example of public money being wasted by a Government who are supposed to be concentrating on matters of public expenditure. I know that all Governments have made mistakes of that sort, but they do not come to the House on a Thursday afternoon and have a debate on them. They leave the matter quiet, and hope that people will not notice. They hope that, when they say that certain matters will be put right later, we will accept their assurances.

Mr. David Hunt: I recall that the right hon. Gentleman served in the last Labour Government with Joel Barnett, now Lord Barnett. Has he had an opportunity to read the speech that Lord Barnett made yesterday in the other place, in which he praised the Government's handling of the economy, and said that Labour would do no better and that it would need more tax?

Mr. Sheldon: My noble Friend did not say that—the right hon. Gentleman is misquoting him. Lord Barnett is my dear friend of long standing; I have a great attachment to him, so I always listen to what he says with great interest. What he said was that, at the moment, the economy is doing well—but what is to come? How can we be sure that that will continue?

My noble Friend speaks as one who, when he was Chief Secretary to the Treasury, wanted to increase expenditure on health and education, and he still hopes for improvement. As he rightly points out, improvements are possible without increasing expenditure, but they will be much smaller than he would wish—we must all agree with that. If we want very big improvements, it is obvious that we must increase expenditure; only smaller improvements can be achieved out of the modest increases in expenditure that come from savings elsewhere in Government programmes, but that method nevertheless offers some opportunities.

To return to the subject of the debate, the PAC issues about 45 reports a year, most of which are highly critical of the way in which the Government have spent taxpayers' money. For example, it is an astonishing fact that vehicle excise duty evasion is increasing. It increased by 18 per cent. during the period of the PAC's most recent report, and is now estimated at about £163 million a year.

That is a substantial sum of money, but the problem is made even worse by the operation of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, which admits that there are some 23 million unlicensed vehicles on the register. The agency does not know whether those vehicles exist or whether they have been scrapped—it does not know what has happened to them. That makes it difficult to run a licensing organisation of that sort.

There are many other examples that I could quote. During my period as Chairman of the PAC, it has produced about 550 reports, and I shall pick out one or two recent subjects. First, there is the question of organised fraud in social security. That involves not the individual who claims a little more than he or she is entitled to, but bands of criminals going around manufacturing books, whose activities cost about £1 billion a year. We must do something about that. Then there is bovine spongiform encephalopathy, which is costing about £3.5 billion. Some of those difficulties might have been anticipated and some of the expenditure saved.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): I have been listening with care to the right hon. Gentleman's speech. Does he not agree that action is being taken through the Benefits Agency and Post Office Counters Ltd. arrangement to deal with many of the fraud matters to which he referred? Would he also agree that not all the reports from the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office are bad? Some have praised Government expenditure—for example, a recent report praised value for money in respect of privatisation receipts.

Mr. Sheldon: No doubt there have been several in which criticism has been muted or even absent. However, the right hon. Gentleman will be aware of the constant criticism of the privatisations. The PAC does not look at policies—we take the policy for granted, and ask whether we got value for money. Again and again, in respect of nearly all the privatisations, we have pointed out that there were ways of getting better value for the taxpayer—for example, by selling the asset in tranches.

One should not sell off the whole of asset at one go; one should take one's time and see what the market will bear, in the same way as one sells one's gilt-edged stocks—the right hon. Gentleman will understand that one does not sell them all on 1 January, but feels out the market and sells according to the state of the market. That method was never used in the privatisations, although it was employed to a certain extent when British Telecom was privatised. So many privatisation issues were made without the full value of the asset being obtained.

In passing, I make the point that the suggestion of selling in tranches came from a Conservative Member, the right hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern). We made use of his valuable suggestion; it is a pity that the Government did not use it more fully.

To return to other examples of Government mistakes, there were the expenditures on the poll tax and on the Child Support Agency. There was the scandal of the works of art at the Ministry of Defence, when 200 out of 900 valuable works were missing. I understand that other Governments might have a similar record to the one held by the Conservative Government, but for a Government to hold a debate on the subject when such a debate is not essential suggests that they have something of which to be proud. They have nothing of which to be proud.

The record on the spending of taxpayers' money is not good. If the Government felt that the debate was necessary, they might have kept it a little quieter.

[Mr. Sheldon]

The purpose was to expose the plans of my right hon. Friends, but instead the Government have exposed their own record.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This afternoon, Ministers heard the Minister of Agriculture give the House the impression that the slaughterhouse document that was the subject of the statement this afternoon had been passed to the Scottish Office. That seemed remarkable, given that the Scottish Office had established an inquiry by Professor Hugh Pennington and that the professor had not had sight of that document. It now appears that Scottish Office officials are briefing the press to the effect that the Scottish Office did not have that document.

There seems at the very least to be substantial confusion between these two Departments as they pass the poisoned chalice to one another. May I expect that on Monday, if not sooner, we might have a statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland or the Minister of Agriculture, clarifying the matter and saying who was responsible for not giving the copy of that vital document to Professor Hugh Pennington to assist in his inquiry into E. coli 0157?

Madam Deputy Speaker: As the House will know, the Chair is not responsible for the accuracy or otherwise of the words of any Member of the House—indeed, were they to be responsible, I doubt that anyone would be found to occupy the Chair—but I have no doubt that those sitting on the Treasury Bench will have heard the hon. Gentleman's words, and perhaps this matter can be pursued another way.

7.10 pm

Sir Archibald Hamilton (Epsom and Ewell): I start by apologising to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary for the fact that I shall not be here for his winding-up speech tonight, as I have a long-term engagement that I cannot avoid.

Public expenditure has always been notoriously difficult to control, and it is sad that we still have not got away from the ethos that causes people to believe that a "good" Secretary of State is one who obtains a generous settlement from the Treasury in the public expenditure survey round. The Treasury is always painted as the enemy, and the press does not much help by criticising Ministers who have been seen to lose out in battles with the Treasury.

It is a small regret of mine that during my long and very enjoyable time in the Government, I was never a Treasury Minister, but as a taxpayer I know where my interests lie in this battle, because it must be in the interests of all taxpayers to have a Government who control public expenditure, provide good services and, where possible, lower taxes.

I am always amazed by the attitude of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). In some remark about the provision of personal pensions, he said that that was an area which had cost the Government money. That is not true. What happened is that people who were prepared to pay money to provide their own pensions received tax relief and kept a little bit of their money, which otherwise the Government would have taken. Opposition Members' attitude seems to be that all our money belongs to the Government, and they are extremely generous to allow us to keep some of it. That is a major difference in the attitude of the two sides of the House to people's money.

We all know that Britain has an impressive record on inward investment. The total inward investment stock stood at £150 billion last year, and it is a credit to British industry that our investment abroad stood at an even higher figure—£214 billion.

There are many reasons for our great record on inward investment, not least the trade union reforms, which have transformed industrial relations, and a very well-educated work force. There has been deregulation and privatisation. A very important factor has been our relatively low public expenditure and taxation—relative, that is, to western Europe. It must be a matter of congratulation to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary that our public expenditure is 8 per cent. below the European Union average.

However, we are in danger of being complacent. It has been said many times tonight that we live in a world marketplace. We do trade, and must trade, with countries outside Europe. Public expenditure of 41.5 per cent. of gross national product, although it is reducing to 40 per cent., is not especially good if comparisons are made with many of the other countries with which we trade.

The fact that our western European partners are even worse should be no reassurance. Federal and state taxes as a percentage of GNP are 33.3 per cent. in the United States and 36.2 per cent. in Japan. In many of the young economies in the far east that are becoming extremely assertive, the figure is probably about 30 per cent. I know that they have young populations and do not have the problems of aging people that we have in western Europe, but those are the countries with which we must compete, and it is important that we start to bring our public expenditure down to their levels. I hope that we shall set ourselves new targets. I hope that, having hit 40 per cent., we shall start bringing our public expenditure down to 35 per cent., to enable us to compete with the world at large.

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East made noises about the social model not working very well in western Europe at the moment. That must be one of the understatements that we have heard tonight—an understatement to beat all understatements. France and Germany are suffering from appallingly high wage costs, very high social costs heaped on top and very high public expenditure. As has been proven in this country, those countries want proper Conservative Governments, because it is crucial to liberate their markets, to denationalise their industries—it is amazing how much industry in France remains in state hands—to regulate their trade unions and to improve industrial relations. It is also crucial that they move much of the burden of social provision from the public to the private sector.

Germany's problems are very great. It is already exporting many of its manufacturing jobs to eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, and those problems can only get worse when those countries eventually join the European Union.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security on the plans that he has unveiled to reform pension provision. Such reform will have a

significant impact on public expenditure, albeit far in the future. Once again, where Britain leads, Europe should follow, because the pension liabilities of some of our European partners, which will start to come to the fore in about 2015 or 2020, are horrific. Some of them will have to find moneys equivalent to 50 per cent. of gross national product then. They cannot sit and do nothing; they must start taking action now. In Chile, where the pension provision system was changed by General Pinochet 20 years ago, the effects are starting to come through only today. It takes a very long time indeed for such changes to work their way through.

Any Government of this country must limit the totals of public expenditure, and that means that there must be constant pressure to contract out services, with all the political significance that that has. It means that, in many cases where sections of the public sector have been moved into the private sector, there are redundancies, and sometimes people are paid lower wages, but I am afraid that those are some of the consequences of the competitive pressures of the marketplace being brought to bear.

We must continue with the privatisation programme, and I sincerely hope that we shall consider privatising the Post Office, because unless it is privatised, it will go nowhere. It is already falling drastically behind in the world communications market and it needs to invest in a mass of new technology. The money for that investment cannot possibly be found from the public purse. As we have seen, there are vast pressures on public expenditure. The investment that the Post Office needs is so large that it could never be afforded by the public sector. I do not believe that there is some squirmy way of getting out of the problem by creating a hybrid, halfway between the public and the private sector.

The Post Office must be denationalised and opened up. It must be given all the opportunities that were given to British Telecom when it was privatised, to invest in all the latest technology, to expand, to compete abroad and to become a serious international company. If we do not denationalise the Post Office, it will simply die on its feet. There is no alternative.

I am delighted to hear that we are to denationalise London Underground. Once again, there is an organisation in desperate need of investment. There is no way that that investment will come from the public purse. The sooner we get it into the private sector, the better, so that it can receive the investment that it needs.

There is clearly more to be done with prisons and hospitals.

Against that background, it is incredible to suggest that a Labour Government, if there ever were one, could come anywhere near matching the Conservative record on reducing taxes and controlling spending. Labour surprised me by suggesting that it could keep within the control totals set out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor for the next two years. As has been pointed out already, included in those figures are privatisation receipts of £1.5 billion. Where will the money come from, if Labour is not prepared to entertain privatisation?

It is fallacious to suggest that if £2.5 billion-worth of council house sales receipts are spent, somehow that is new money that does not count against the public expenditure totals. That is not the case. The fact is that if the money is drawn down, it will have to be replaced, because it represents loans to councils. All local authority spending, on council houses or anything else, goes towards the public expenditure totals. If the money is spent, it will still count and will be extra public expenditure, so it would not be possible to keep within the totals for the first two years.

The minimum wage will have a devastating effect on the public sector. It is usually suggested that the minimum wage should be brought in at £4.26 per hour. That is what everyone seems to think would be a significant minimum wage, if it were to happen. It would be a significant cost to the public sector—£3.7 billion. Once again, that would increase the pressures on public expenditure upwards.

The impact of a minimum wage would be much greater than its effect on the public sector wage roll. It would victimise those in our society who are least well educated and least skilled, and older people who are incapable of learning new skills. I have never understood how it can be argued that a labour market is different from any other market. If one shoves up the price of labour, one employs fewer people, because businesses cannot afford to employ them, or because they use automation and machinery instead. The effect is to push up the cost to the public sector by putting many people who were in employment on to the dole, where they claim income support and become a burden on the taxpayer.

It is incredible to suggest that socialists, whether old or new Labour, have changed their attitude to spending other people's money. Labour councils are some of the highest-spending councils in the country, and have been restrained only by the fact that their expenditure has been capped. Even that restraint would go, if we had a Labour Government. Immense extra sums would be spent by councils, if the capping restrictions were removed.

To anyone who has observed the political debate over the past few years, it is remarkable to hear any Labour party spokesman speak of restraining public expenditure, when all the attacks on my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench have focused on the fact that they have been cutting it. We hear nothing but the constant refrain of cuts on this, that and the next thing.

Public expenditure is extremely high in Britain. It is quite wrong for the Government to be accused of cuts, especially as most areas of public expenditure have grown. Moreover, it indicates a mindset. If Labour spokesmen are so concerned about cuts, can they be serious about restraining public expenditure, if they ever had the chance to do so?

What about taxation? What realistic chance is there that a Labour Government would cut tax? We inherited a standard rate of 33 per cent., with 83 per cent. being the top rate, and on top of that an unearned income surcharge of 15 per cent. It is almost unbelievable that some people were paying 98 per cent. of their income in tax, but that is what we inherited in 1979. Conservative Governments brought down taxes by stages. What did Labour do? It voted against every one. When my noble Friend Lord Lawson, in his Budget in 1988, reduced the top rate to 40 per cent., there was an outcry from the Opposition, as if an iniquitous crime was being committed, by bringing our rates down to an internationally competitive level.

It was not only on taxation that Labour consistently voted against what the Government were trying to do. Labour voted against every privatisation brought before the House. When one considers the record of success, it is

[Sir Archibald Hamilton]

extraordinary that the income to the Government from taxation receipts from the privatised industries is greater than the sum that was being paid out in subsidies to those industries before privatisation.

Labour was wrong about privatisation. It was wrong about the sale of council houses, and voted against that. Labour voted against trade union reform, and it was wrong on that. Labour has been wrong on every major decision taken by the Government and by the House. Why should Labour ever be right? Why should Labour ever be trusted by the people of Britain?

7.26 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I was interested to hear the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton), who made many fair points in defence of the Government's record, but seemed to be remarkably unconcerned about the social fallout from the massive changes that have taken place during that period. There is a fear among people that constant change, constant privatisation, the constant shedding of labour and the constant attempt to drive down public expenditure, all of which might be legitimate, nevertheless create significant social casualties, to which the Government have at times seemed rather indifferent.

An interesting fact, which brings that into sharp relief, is that the total number of extra people who have been claiming unemployment benefit since 1979, and the cumulative cost of those extra benefits, almost exactly equals the entire value of the taxation receipts from North sea oil and all the privatisation yields. That is why, at the end of 18 or 19 years, the Government's overall tax take is slightly higher than it was under the last Labour Government, and tax cuts have not been achieved across the board.

There have been changes in tax rates, and the burden of taxation and its impact have been changed, but the overall take has not significantly changed. That is because such an upheaval cannot be achieved without both social and economic costs. I am not saying that the changes were wrong or that benefits did not flow from them, but the Conservative party occasionally seems a little unconcerned about the people caught in the maelstrom, who have no control over the situation in which they find themselves.

For the record, I want to point out that my party—the Liberals, as well as the Liberal Democrats and the Social Democrats—did not oppose every privatisation. We did not oppose the privatisation of BP or British Airways. We were concerned about the way in which British Airways was privatised, to the disadvantage of other airlines and with the eventual destruction of British Caledonian and a number of other airlines. Similarly, we did not oppose in principle the privatisation of British Telecom, the electricity companies and British Gas.

However, we were concerned about the lack of competition and the consequences of privatising those companies in a monopoly state. We believe that those privatisations cost us a great deal, and their consequences have not yet been fully addressed. That is not to say that there will not be benefits at the end of the day. Nevertheless, the privatisations could have been conducted in a manner that advantaged the taxpayer: a greater yield could have been secured, as the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), pointed out, and the consumer might have also had a real choice.

We actively supported much of the legislation reforming the trade unions—indeed, we pressed the Government for such reform on several occasions. We were ahead of the Government in calling for the abolition of the closed shop. I vividly remember calling for the abolition of the dock labour scheme in this House on a Monday, and the Government announcing on Thursday that that would occur. The port of Aberdeen was then paralysed by a dockers' strike, and the Prime Minister prayed in aid my remarks to justify her decision.

I put those facts on record because, although this is billed as a public expenditure debate, the tax implications and the changes that are taking place are part and parcel of it. I am somewhat intrigued by the Government's tactics regarding business planning. This is the third or the fourth Conservative Opposition day. I do not know how many more there will be but, by the time the House reconvenes in May, I am sure that the Conservatives will be well practised in the art of opposition—which is just as well because they will experience it for many years.

There is consensus across the parties that we need to control public expenditure not just in the interests of regulating borrowing, bringing down inflation and keeping taxation low, but because we know that the efficient targeting of public expenditure enables the effective delivery of public services to those who need them most. A specific aim of Liberal Democrat policy is to continue to bear down on, and control, public expenditure. We have made a commitment to hold non-education and non-health expenditure below the level of real gross domestic product growth in order to allow us to concentrate first on increasing real expenditure on education and health and secondly on reducing borrowing. That clear priority has been costed into the Liberal Democrats' alternative Budget, and it will also be costed into our manifesto programme.

Like Conservative Members, we were intrigued—indeed, somewhat astonished—by the shadow Chancellor's announcement that there would be no changes in income tax rates under a Labour Government, and that he would adopt the Conservatives' spending envelope for the next two years. I doubt very much whether the Conservatives really intended to adopt their spending envelope for the next two years—especially as they had tended to review it twice a year.

We part company with both the Conservative and the Labour parties in our belief that certain areas of public service expenditure are now so seriously deprived of funding that they cannot maintain acceptable provision at current spending levels. We accept that quality education and health are not all about money. However, we do not believe that it is possible to see real and significant improvements in standards and to achieve specific objectives without injecting additional resources.

We believe that every three to four-year-old child whose parents wish it should be entitled to nursery education. Both the other parties claim to support that concept, but neither is prepared to fund it. We believe that it should be funded from this year. We want to reduce class sizes, starting with the first three primary classes.

We want to increase expenditure on books and educational equipment and improve the physical quality of the teaching environment in schools.

We have identified that expenditure as totalling about £2 billion a year, or £10 billion across a Parliament. We do not believe that that investment can be delayed any longer or that it can be funded by an increase in borrowing—which we all agree is too high. We believe that that investment could be funded by reversing the decision to cut the standard rate of income tax by a penny, which the Government announced in the last Budget. The Liberal Democrats have made a clear, unequivocal commitment to returning the standard rate of income tax to 24p in the pound in order to fund that expenditure.

I visited Wirral—where I have some family connections—the day before polling. I was interested by the number of people—many of whom were lifelong Conservative voters—who told me, "We shall certainly vote against the Conservatives. We are absolutely determined to get rid of this Government and we shall vote Labour to do that." However, quite a few added, "But we are not sure that voting in a Labour Government will make any difference." The Labour party has boxed itself in to such an extent—in the light of its record, I understand the reasons why—that people wonder whether it will be able to deliver the much-needed extra investment in education. Education was an issue in that by-election.

Those are perfectly honourable debating points: it is a matter of priorities and of legitimate choice. The Labour party is setting out its stall—I do not complain about that—and the electorate are entitled to make their own judgment. I contend that the people of this country believe that it will not be possible to improve the quality of education and maintain the quality of the health service within the existing spending priorities and via the modest changes that are on offer. When one says, "Whichever Government get in, taxes will go up," people just nod; they are resigned to that fact.

The sad thing is that people do not believe any of us any more. Their experience, particularly over the past five years, is that politicians will say almost anything to get elected and renege on their promises once that happens. That is a sad sign of the decline in the relationship between politicians and the electorate. We must try to re-establish that confidence. We should tell people honestly what can and cannot be achieved. I do not take issue entirely with the Labour party: I accept that Labour Members are trying to be honest about what may be achieved. However, there are some gaping holes when it comes to how Labour's pledges will be honoured.

At present, Conservative politicians are fond of attacking the credibility of Opposition spending and tax programmes, which distracts attention from their own policy. However, upon examining the Red Book and reading the speeches of the Prime Minister and his Ministers, I find it hard to believe that the Conservative party has a credible tax and spending programme for an entire Parliament—which is all right, because it will not need one. Nevertheless, I think that the public do not find it credible either. Most Conservative attacks on the Opposition are designed to distract attention from the fact that the Red Book forecasts do not maintain a credible scenario beyond the first two years.

The Conservatives' promises depend on achieving some very optimistic forecasts. That is a significant point. The Chancellor assumes that, between 1992–93 and 2000–2001—that is the basis of his overall working assumption—there will be eight years of continuous economic growth at above 2 per cent. per annum. That has never happened in recorded British economic history.

Mr. Jack: We have never had a Chancellor like this before.

Mr. Bruce: It is all very well to say that. When challenging Opposition politicians, Conservative Members are fond of saying, "First, create your growth." However, the Tories are basing their spending plans on a level of growth that has never been produced. If they deliver it, they will be able to spend it; if they do not, their forecasts and promises are empty. That is the real situation.

There is also an element of modifying the books. When forecasting expenditure commitments, one traditionally assumes a flat unemployment situation—that is, one assumes that unemployment will remain at the same level as the previous year. The Government assume falling unemployment for the first year. I hope that they are right, but a change of forecasting technique has enabled them to claim that there is extra room for manoeuvre; all that they have done is changed the rules, to massage the figures so that they look slightly more acceptable. If they are unsuccessful, their promises will not add up. That is why the public are increasingly disillusioned about what the Conservatives have to say.

We all need to review certain base areas of Government expenditure provision. The Government's big idea on pensions, which they announced yesterday, is not so big really, because all the parties agree in principle that we have to do something about funding the earnings-related aspect of pensions in the long term if we are to deliver it. We all have reason to be ashamed that the basic state pension is inadequate and that it will be unsustainable even to provide an inadequate basic pension for many people who do not have alternative provision. All the parties agree on that. The Governments's proposals—at least with modified details—are within the ball park of what we all can agree.

It is a cheek for the Government to announce, after 18 years, without debate, and six or eight weeks before a general election, "We", one party, "are about to introduce the biggest overhaul in pension provision ever achieved." As they freely admit, they are looking to operate the programme over 30 to 40 years. If there is one matter on which all the parties should co-operate, it is how to fund pensions—something that will have to be managed by successive Governments of different political complexions. It simply is not good enough for one party to claim that it can sort out pensions on its own. I anticipate the debate next week, so I shall not dwell on that further.

We have to review the way in which further and higher education is funded, because the reality is that Government funding has been like a roller coaster: massive expansion, then a panic, then a sudden contraction, which has resulted in inadequate resources. There is nothing in place to ensure the proper management and sustained expansion of further and higher education to the quality that we need.

[Mr. Bruce]

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), the deputy leader of the Labour party, argued about the extent to which the Government have passed on debt to local authorities. Apart from anything else, that has created conflict between central and local government, which is not healthy for the proper delivery of good-quality public services. It is simply preposterous for the Government to suggest that every council in the country is profligate, incompetent and disreputable in its delivery of public services.

The Government know that that is not true, and so do the public. There is a variation in quality in how councils deliver services, but the Government have consistently increased their expectations of what councils will do, while reducing the allocation of funds from central taxation. At the same time, they have reduced the ability of councils to raise their own revenue. Fifteen years ago, councils controlled 50 per cent. of their revenue; they now control 15 per cent. The Government have in effect taken the revenue from councils and used it to disguise their own incompetence, and refused to allow councils a realistic allocation of resources.

The Government have financed much of their programmes by selling off capital assets, but we are running out of capital assets to sell and mechanisms by which to sell them that give a good deal to the taxpayer and a good service to customers. I am prepared, as is my party, to consider any reasonable and realistic proposals. There is a proposal to privatise London Underground, but at a very low price in relation to its capital assets, and that does not answer the question of how one will sustain the service in the long term. If it is to depend on continuing massive taxpayer subsidies, there will be many questions about why private companies should be allowed to fund their profits from taxpayer subsidies.

I do not accept that it is not possible to fund publicly owned enterprises out of the private sector without increasing the cost on the public sector borrowing requirement. Risk-bearing bonds for specific projects are a perfectly reputable, well-established way of financing specific developments that do not need to be charged to the PSBR. It is the Government's ideological drive to privatise but not to explore the ability to bring in the private sector in a risk-bearing but worthwhile way to the mutual benefit of both parties. The job of the private sector is to bring the benefits of management and risk analysis. The job of the public service is to ensure that we deliver adequate services. It is perfectly possible for the two to be combined.

As we move towards a general election, the public will have before them two parties offering something that the public know that they cannot deliver: falling borrowing, falling taxes and rising public services. I have said on numerous occasions that there are not many people on earth who have learned how to walk on water, and none of them is on either of the Front Benches. The reality is that people want a presentation of what the priorities are; how they will be paid for; what can be done; and what cannot be done. That is exactly what they will get from the Liberal Democrats.

7.45 pm

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): Earlier today the House enjoyed a dress rehearsal for the general election debate ahead, although the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) will be in trouble with the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) if his soundbites are as long as his speech.

At the risk of being a party pooper after all the excitement earlier—there is a pervasive air of unreality in the debate between the two Front Benches on public expenditure—I wish to say something about that and then to spell out in detail the implications that it has for higher education, to which the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) referred in an excellent speech. The unreality lies in the fact that both Front Benches seem to believe, first, that it is impossible to raise taxes, apart from Labour's one-off exception—the so-called windfall tax—secondly, that public borrowing must be reduced, not least to meet the Maastricht criteria and, thirdly, that it is possible at the same time to maintain public services free to their users at present standards or at even higher standards.

I believe that that is, to put it charitably, an unrealistic conclusion because most public services are labour intensive and their nature is such that machinery cannot easily be substituted for human labour. The price of labour in the public sector is largely determined by independent pay review bodies, operating on the principle of comparability with the private sector. Accordingly, the cost of public services will tend to rise roughly in line with those in the rest of the economy. However, if public borrowing is to be reduced and taxes cannot be increased, either the cost of labour in the public sector must be brought down, by abandoning the comparability principle, or the number of public sector employees must be reduced. Either way, the quality of public services will fall if my assumption—that technology cannot so easily replace labour—is correct and the funds for public investment in new technology are tightly constrained.

It is the proud boast of my right hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench that the ratio of public spending to gross domestic product in Britain has fallen to some 41.6 per cent. in the present financial year, and that it is scheduled to fall still further in future years. By ruling out increases in both taxes and public borrowing, the Labour Front Bench has implicitly accepted that Britain will continue to have the lowest public expenditure to GDP ratio in Europe. Well and good. I have no fundamental quarrel with that project, although I am not sure that it will carry public support when the implications are properly understood. As responsible politicians, we have a duty to face up to those implications, even eight weeks before a general election.

In spite of the remarks by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East about the European social model, the position on both sides of the House appears to be that Britain's true comparators are not the countries of continental Europe with public expenditure to GDP ratios of roughly 50 per cent., but rather the United States and Japan with public expenditure to GDP ratios of 33.3 per cent. and 36.2 per cent. respectively.

It must surely follow that our aspirations in terms of public services should match those of the Americans and the Japanese rather than those of the continental Europeans. Alternatively, we must resign ourselves to running public services that lack the private sector-driven buoyancy of their equivalents in the United States and Japan and are increasingly degraded and slummy compared with those on the continent.

What is the way forward? If the present Front-Bench consensus prevails, we are surely obliged to look at the way in which health, education and other public services are financed in the United States and Japan. Let me pick out one feature. In almost every case, services which in Britain and elsewhere in Europe are provided at public expense free to the users are funded in the United States and Japan on a mixed public-private basis. In my view, the only way forward consistent with our aspirations to keep a low public expenditure to GDP ratio and to maintain high-quality public services is to put them on a new financial footing based on a mixture of public and private funding.

I do not want to venture any general observations about how it should be done, except to say that we must recognise how astonishingly inept we have been in the past at handling the issue, notwithstanding the recent welcome innovation of the private finance initiative.

Every ideology—left, right and centre—has conspired to produce the result that in Britain services are either wholly private—in which case almost anything goes—or wholly public, in which case the Treasury rules, usually to the most obscurantist degree. We face a real effort of imagination—almost of self-overcoming—if we are to succeed on the road we really must take.

The best that I can do in the time I have today is to turn to one sector of public spending in which we are perhaps closer than in any other to embracing the idea of public-private co-operation: higher education.

In the universities, even at the height of the welfare state consensus, there always remained an element of private finance in the shape of the deemed contribution by parents to the maintenance of their student children. At the end of the 1980s, I had, as a Minister, something to do with the introduction of a further source of private finance through loans to students to enable them to finance part of their maintenance by anticipating their future earnings after graduation. Although the policy was fiercely resisted at the time, it is now seen to have been right and there is a emerging consensus that students and/or their parents should be expected to contribute further. A committee chaired by Sir Ron Dearing is deliberating on the matter and is expected to report in the mid-year—safely after the election.

I now come to what I consider to be the essential issue—whether, as some suggest, increased private contribution to higher education costs should continue to be limited to maintenance costs only, or whether it should be directed to the funding of higher education proper. In line with my previous argument about the implications of the attitude of Members on both Front Benches to tax and spending, I would plead with Front-Bench Members at least to keep the option open during the election campaign.

One reason for my request is that the additional finance that will be required to maintain higher education of an acceptable quality will not be forthcoming simply by shifting into university funding the residual public spending of some £1.3 billion which at present goes to student support, if that were to be the deal on offer. Sir Ron Dearing and his colleagues will make their assessment of what will be required and it would be wrong and, above all, unnecessary for Front-Bench Members to prejudge the matter before the committee reports.

I said earlier that in Britain every ideology conspires to make us bad at managing private-public partnerships. The debate about higher education funding provides a good example in the shape of the widely held notion on both sides of the House that education must be free, so tuition costs at university must always be met by the taxpayer with nothing expected from students and their families. The great principle of universal free university education is absent in the United States and Japan, where the great private universities and the state universities charge tuition fees. It is also a comparatively recent innovation in Britain, where a deemed parental contribution to tuition fees remained until the late 1970s.

The notion that university education must be free to users has no philosophical justification. There is a logical link between the idea of compulsory education and the principle of state funding. If the state imposes an obligation upon parents, it has a duty to ensure that parents—or at any rate poor parents—can meet that obligation. Outside the limits of compulsion, however, it seems to me that there is no moral obligation on taxpayers to pay for education. The only considerations are those of expediency, such as at what price for education do undesirable consequences emerge in terms of participation rates or access by all social classes. Can it really be true, as the exponents of free higher education sometimes seem to argue, that the price of education to the student has to be set at zero to bring about any desired level of participation?

Is university education so poorly esteemed among the working classes, for example, that any price above zero will make it unattractive? One has only to ask those questions to know the answer. Practical experience since the introduction of student loans has demonstrated that requiring students to contribute to their costs while studying is compatible with higher participation rates in general and in detail with higher participation rates from the less advantaged social classes.

Two further fallacies underlie the ideology that although their maintenance might be paid by students themselves, tuition should not. The first is that there is a meaningful distinction to the student and his family, but in practice each student will have only one budget in which what matters is the size of his total outgoings rather than their various purposes. The second is that while tuition is a fixed cost, maintenance is a discretionary variable—as if the geographical distribution of our universities and the range of their courses were such that all students had an equal discretionary ability to save costs by living at home.

That brings me to equity, which must always be a central value in our public expenditure policies. Not only is it inequitable and unrealistic to assume that more than a fraction of students have the discretion to continue to live at home; there is also a marked inequity in the idea that the additional contribution we envisage from students should be towards maintenance rather than tuition.

If the entire cost of student maintenance has to be met by student borrowing, the effect will be to eliminate the contribution that is now expected from better-off parents, and amounts to some £800 million. Making students liable for all their maintenance costs would be socially regressive, in the same way as Shirley Williams' abolition of the parental contribution to tuition fees in the late 1970s.

[Mr. Robert Jackson]

Still worse, if our main concern is to restrain the growth of public expenditure, the policy of requiring the student to contribute more to his maintenance rather than to tuition costs must be relatively expensive, at least until that distant date when income from the loans scheme will exceed expenditure on it.

As such a high proportion of the student body is from better-off families, the Treasury will incur substantial up-front costs as parental contributions are replaced by student borrowing. If, however, the parental contribution to student maintenance were retained alongside a private charge for tuition, most better-off families would continue to use their own resources to assist their student children to pay the bills.

In debates about public expenditure, it is all too easy to frame one's arguments solely in terms of the balance sheet, and that is how I have argued so far. We also have to recognise a deeper truth—that the way in which we pay for services can have implications for the way in which they are provided. Let me again apply that insight about public expenditure to the specific case of higher education.

There is a curious paradox in British universities today. In every other area of public policy, there is a healthy all-party consensus that decentralisation is desirable, that local units should be encouraged to get on with the job and that morale in public services depends on local initiative and local responsibility. In our universities, however, the whole trend of the last 20 years has been in the opposite direction. As the cost to the state of higher education has risen, the state and its agencies have, perhaps inevitably, become more and more directive and intrusive in their relations with the universities. The effects are well known to all who know the universities: a growing sense of powerlessness, and a pervasive demoralisation. The balance sheet may look good to the Treasury—more, much more, higher education at lower, much lower, unit costs—but what, meanwhile, is happening to what we think that we are buying?

Here we move beyond the question of resources to more fundamental questions, about the conditions in which activities such as university teaching and learning survive and flourish. I believe that what is needed is a greater measure of autonomy and local responsibility than the present state-dominated and state-accountable funding arrangements allow. Not only are more resources required for that, but, more fundamentally, those resources should be private, not public, and those who provide them should be accountable not to politicians and bureaucrats but to the users who benefit—or hope to benefit—from what they are paying for.

That is not to say that I am calling for a complete privatisation of the universities. That would be impracticable, and, in view of the importance of the public interest in higher education, it would also be undesirable. What I am pleading for in the funding of higher education is a mixed financial system, analogous to, for example, the system in the university of California. If we are to approximate to the American ratio of public expenditure to gross domestic product, let us at the same time adopt the admirable American system of higher education funding, in which the taxpayer's contribution is complemented by student fees so that the autonomy of universities is underpinned by the margin of financial manoeuvre that is secured by some 10 to 20 per cent. of income outside state control.

In the interests of social equity, the state should of course act to enable students to pay such fees. The student loan scheme should be extended—preferably outside the public sector borrowing requirement—to enable students to borrow up to a certain overall limit, both to maintain themselves and to pay their contribution to the costs of tuition. Beyond that the state should not intervene, except perhaps to insist that "means-blind" admission policies should be followed as a condition of state funding. In particular, the state should resist the temptation to try to fix the level of student fees. As the purpose of the policy should be to underpin university autonomy, the matter of fees should be left entirely to the autonomous institutions. It should be an essentially private transaction between universities and their students.

I make no apology for taking advantage of a debate on public expenditure to make a speech that is mainly about university finance. Not only is higher education an important branch of public spending in quantitative terms; it is also a striking example of how the way in which public spending works can affect the quality of the services being purchased. Our universities are like the proverbial goose that lays the golden eggs. So much do we appreciate the eggs that we are directing more and more effort to their mass production at the lowest possible cost-to-benefit ratio. As a result, the gold is rapidly turning to ever-thinner plate, and we are on course to create a university system that is over-centralised, over-bureaucratised and increasingly lacking in quality. In a country which has to live by its wits, that is unacceptable, and the first step towards putting the matter right must be to recognise the unreality of the assumptions about public expenditure, on both sides of the House, that have brought us to this pass.

8.3 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): It is a great pleasure to follow such a thoughtful speech as that made by the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), although I disagreed with some of his conclusions, especially the one relating to his Californian example. The way in which the economy works in that part of the United States is so fundamentally different from the way in which it works here that I am not sure that it would be possible to import the system. Nevertheless, the House should heed the hon. Gentleman's thoughtful comments.

A few minutes ago, a telephone message was passed to me, consisting of some of my daughter's interim examination results. I am rapidly putting money aside for to fund her university education.

The debate began with what appeared to be a campaign to secure shadow Cabinet places under the next Labour Government. I want to deal with two specific issues, one of which was not dissimilar to a point raised by the hon. Member for Wantage. The first is public funding for science, which used to be—and doubtless still is—of great interest to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury; the second is the funding of local authorities. There are serious anomalies in the Government's attitude to both.

In his usual robust fashion, the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt) spoke about the Wirral, South by-election, and made a number of comments about the

European dimension. A week ago today, I attended a party in Hulme hall, Port Sunlight, to celebrate a magnificent victory. The last time I was in that hall, I was negotiating with Unilever on the creation of a European works council—that was during my previous life. Unilever, one of our most successful companies, has agreed to set up works councils to cover the various divisions of its operations, and now recognises that there are benefits to both company and employees in keeping the organisation moving.

I return to the public funding of science. As most people will know, during the past two days, the Science and Technology Committee has been considering the subject of a sheep called Dolly, which has probably had more jokes made about it than any other sheep that has ever existed. Some important issues were raised. In a public hearing today, the Roslin institute gave extremely important evidence to the Committee.

What worries me is that, in our drive to lower the headline public expenditure figures, we are not looking behind that headline and at the detail. As a result, confusing messages are emerging. The Roslin institute has links with not only the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food but the Home Office, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Health, and the funding structure is very confused. We were shocked to hear today that the institute, which is doing very valuable work relating to animal husbandry and future medical benefits, is suffering massive cuts. It is rather ironic that the Minister of Agriculture should be limping with a broken limb today, given that one of the 30 per cent. cuts was in bone biology. We are missing the point. A long-term investment strategy should be adopted in such areas to ensure that the public get the best value for money.

One of the great problems—the Chief Secretary will recognise it from his days as a Science Minister—is the long gestation period of such research. It has been especially difficult to create the right financial structure in the United Kingdom to generate private sector companies that will support the type of innovative companies that exist on the west coast of California that do research in, for example, human genetics, and will give more support to the work of the public institutes and the universities. One company, PPL, works closely with the Roslin institute, but such companies are rare in this country.

Our venture capitalists seem to lack the confidence to support research in areas in which the Government might pull the plug. For example, tremendous work is being done with transgenic sheep, an area of research that may yield clear therapeutic benefits for cystic fibrosis sufferers. That will be of great benefit to individuals and, of course, to the public purse, because supporting those who suffer from complex genetic illnesses costs significant sums. Financially and morally, we should try to create the environment in which such research can take place.

Sadly, because headline cuts are needed to satisfy the soundbite politics of the Chancellor, we have not addressed the long-term strategic needs properly. The work that is the subject of the Select Committee's inquiry will receive a 50 per cent. cut in this financial year and is projected to lose all its funding from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the following year. That is shortsighted, and it will have two effects. First, it will mean that the Roslin institute has to cut its major research programmes that could be beneficial to animal husbandry and human health. Secondly, people will lose their jobs and, potentially, become a burden on the state. The entire team might be headhunted by countries with a more innovative approach to the public funding of science. The team could go and work on the west coast of the States, because of the different funding environment. I hope that the Government can give some reassurance to those people. The bizarre tabloid headlines of the past week may have woken the Treasury up to the need to continue funding for that research because of its long-term social benefits.

I shall now consider the problems experienced in Ellesmere Port and Neston, which the district auditor believes to be a well-run local authority. Again, the Government are missing the point about some serious problems. Extraordinarily, given the language that we often hear from Tories, the Government are missing the point about the relevance of investment. That shows in a wide range of areas. The Government have deployed various arguments to explain why they have changed the freedom of local authorities to establish their spending base. The Government now decide the total spending, the planning fees that local authorities can charge, and what they can borrow. Local authorities have to compete with other local authorities for additional resources, such as the single regeneration budget. The projects on which SRB money should be spent are also decided by the Government. That is bizarre. I do not understand how someone 200 miles away can determine the best strategic approach for the redevelopment of a town centre.

Last night, the council set a budget figure for 1997–98 that I predicted almost precisely when I commented on the Chancellor's local government figures in the Budget. The increase in the council tax is some 6.4 per cent. The district council collects the money for the county and the police authority, and those two institutions take up some 83 per cent. of the funds collected. Locally, we began the budget process with a Government decision that we needed to spend some 3.2 per cent. less than last year, despite inflation increasing by 2.5 per cent. The reduction of 3.2 per cent. in what we are supposed to spend is almost the highest reduction in the country.

The reduction in spending does not take account of comments made by the district auditor, or of programmes to promote inward investment and to raise housing standards. We all know the correlation between poor housing and poor health. Because of the inflexibility of the funding decisions, the programme of work to renovate pre-cast reinforced concrete properties has been halted, even though it would provide financial advantages for the local authority and the central Exchequer in the long term. If the programme remains stagnant for much longer, the authority will have to demolish properties because they will be beyond economic repair. That is not a good use of public money.

Similarly, there is less flexibility on business rates. Hon. Members who do not live in areas with heavy industry perhaps do not understand the problem. The petro-chemical complex that stretches from Runcorn to Ellesmere Port is a hazard site, and significant funds have to be invested to boost fire service protection and to deal with the environmental health issues that arise from public worries about pollution, yet we derive no benefit from the business rate, which is drawn down to the centre.

[Mr. Andrew Miller]

The local authority is charged with the duty of collecting it, but it does not get its fair share back. Under the previous rating system, there was an element of equity. I believe that Shell was the biggest ratepayer in the county at the time, and that money was available to help boost the shortfall on fire safety and environmental protection issues. Again, we have found ourselves somewhat disadvantaged.

The result of the financial programme is that repairs have been postponed and staff have been reduced—including, I have no doubt, people from the direct works department, which generates a profit and is certified to BS5750. It has been able to get out into the marketplace and win some exciting tenders, but is being stymied by this process. We expect increased charges, even for services that affect our elderly population, such as bus passes. The programme of minor improvements is slowing down and the issue of balances is close to being a joke because the balances are almost non-existent.

How the calculation works and, as I have suggested locally in the past year, the fact that the Government seek to blame the local authority for its council tax rise, is clear when we see how the council tax calculation is made. Of the average increase of about £19.28, the local authority is directly responsible for only 8p. That is extraordinary when we see the Government again running the headline about the successes that they claim will emerge from the Budget.

All the Government have succeeded in doing in both the examples that I have cited is to pass the buck elsewhere. First, the headline cuts in public science will result in long-term disadvantages to the country as well as potentially higher expenditure on unemployment. Secondly, we are seeing an attempt to blame local authorities for something over which they have 8p in £19.28 responsibility. That is not a fair burden of blame. The real blame lies on the Government Benches.

We have heard today a number of examples of how the iniquities in society have grown worse as a result of the processes with which we are currently faced. The right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton) referred to the minimum wage, but he failed to address the other side of the coin. He did not seek to justify employers squeezing down wages and sending people down the road to gain family credit and income support. That is not a proper use of public money. We should set much higher standards than that.

We have also heard about people's rights. The Deputy Prime Minister referred to my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), to deal with what he was alleged to have said in a television interview. My right hon. Friend quite honestly said that he believed that people have rights.

I have referred at length to people who I believe have rights. For example, the people who will benefit from the long-term work at the Roslin institute have rights. The people in my constituency living in poor housing have rights. We as politicians should address those rights. That is where the Deputy Prime Minister missed entirely the point of my right hon. Friend's contribution. We must address the needs of those categories of people and we have a social responsibility to do our best to do that.

8.25 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) paid a compliment to my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), to whom I thought the House owed a genuine debt for using this occasion for so elegant an analysis of a subject very important to our national future, following so swiftly on the Adjournment debate on the same issue initiated by our mutual hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden), at which my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage was also present. It is an index of the House's occasional serendipity that the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston should have followed on a directly analogous topic. I shall, however, be briefer.

I apologise to the House for my absence from the debate for an hour, of which I advised Madam Speaker in advance. I have for the past 20 years been a trustee of a third-world trust, and chairman for the past 10 years or so, and the timing of our trustees' meetings is dictated by the availability of our director, who is often in the third world. I meant no discourtesy to the House.

This is the first time that I have revisited a public expenditure debate since July 1989. Had that year's Government reshuffle—what I choose to call a shuffle—occurred in September 1989 rather than in July, I should have become the longest-serving junior Treasury Minister since 1979.

Today's are arcane matters, yet they constitute 40 per cent. of our national economic activity. In the third of a century between 1945 and 1979, each ratchet of the economic cycle, regardless of who was in government, found us at the end of each relevant ratchet with the economic indices of inflation and unemployment worse than they had been at the end of the prior respective ratchet. My own public expenditure responsibilities during my four years in the Treasury were restricted to assisting the then Chief Secretary in certain regards detailed in the document "Ministerial Responsibilities" of that era. My role was essentially that of Oddjob, the title assigned by the noble Lord Healey to his then Chief Secretary, the noble Lord Barnett, in 1974.

However, I derive vicarious pride, taking a long perspective, from the fact that the high point of public expenditure in the mid-1980s was down to 45.5 per cent. as a percentage of national income and is down to 43.5 per cent. so far in the 1990s, by comparison with 47.25 per cent. in the 1970s. That is a wholly beneficent trend, markedly different from the post-war third of a century that I mentioned earlier, and reflecting the admirable control of public expenditure by Conservative Governments since 1979.

In terms of the current public expenditure plans, I will dwell for a moment on education where, in succession to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary, and a little before my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage, I served as Minister with responsibility for higher education in the early 1980s. I have noticed that the Leader of the Opposition has said that his party's priority is education, education, education. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary and I inherited from the Labour Government an age participation rate in higher education of one in eight. It is an index of the economic success and the imagination of the Government that, despite our rigorous control of public expenditure, the higher education ratio has now

reached one in three. I share with the Leader of the Opposition an enthusiasm for expenditure on education, but I would respect him the more if he gave occasional credit for the scale of the achievement by the higher education sector over the past 18 years.

Earlier this week, I attended a rather scrappy conference put on by some bishops, about what they called the forgotten 30 per cent. I mean no disrespect to the hon. Member for Newham, North–East (Mr. Timms), who spoke there, when I call the conference scrappy. That description is a reflection of its unfocused format.

I am proud that the Government have increased public expenditure per pupil by 50 per cent. in real terms over the past 18 years. I hope that, in the coming years, the increased spending on schools in the present plans will lead to an improvement in performance by the bottom 30 per cent., to match the advances by the top 30 per cent. that I have just mentioned.

Sadly, the commonplace objection to selection in schools—that it condemns many to secondary modern education—has not insured us against an unsatisfactory level of performance among the bottom 30 per cent. in comprehensive schools.

In Northern Ireland, where there is 34 per cent. selection, deliberate attention to the bottom 30 per cent. achieved, at least for a period, an improvement in that sector swifter than any such improvement in Great Britain. That proves that improvement at that level can be effected by the application of intelligence and effort.

I have one last thing to say about the present public expenditure plans. I realise why my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary finds it necessary to cut public expenditure in small Departments in the same way as in large. Large Departments would complain if he did not. But value for money is a key motivator of the Government, and my right hon. Friend will recall his time at the old Department of Education and Science, which I mentioned earlier.

I do not know about my right hon. Friend, or, indeed, about my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage, but during my time there, my detailed knowledge about expenditure in the area of my responsibility was far greater than it could ever have been when I was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I dare say the same might have been true when my right hon. Friend was at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, or at the Department of Health.

Because of the greater familiarity with what one is spending, and thus the ability to be much more in control, in a small Department, I share the unhappiness of some of the clients of small Departments, because cutting those Departments causes them disproportionate damage, yet makes very little difference to the greater sum of things.

Having been rigorously objective about the Government's plans, I shall allow myself a moment of self-indulgence to comment on the public expenditure plans of Her Majesty's loyal Opposition. I appreciate that "plans" is an imprecise word to describe the aims and aspirations to which Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen periodically allude.

Earlier tonight we heard the deputy leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), deliver an exegesis of his views on eye tests. As Lewis Carroll wrote:

"'When *I* use a word', Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone,'it means just what I choose it to mean'".

It is noticeable that some of the pledges from which the Opposition claim that they have resiled have been repeated not once but twice, many of them since November last year, when they originally alleged that they had not been pledges at all. We cannot reasonably be blamed if we recall the words of the Bellman, another of Lewis Carroll's characters:

"What I tell you three times is true".

The line that clear statements about the Opposition's intentions, with clear spending implications, were simply jeux d'esprit, or thoughts collected in a ramble through the woods, does not retain credibility if the risk-laden words are spoken time and again. Nor is disingenuousness about public accounting rules, as in the case of council house receipts, halfway to being an amulet. Labour spokesmen may convince themselves that they are protected by Humpty Dumpty definitions, but it is certain that the financial markets would exact an instant punishment for such disingenuousness.

Of course I acknowledge the fact that Treasury Ministers must make assumptions. Conservatives see virtue in learning from the past. In 1974, the Labour Government made assumptions that underestimated by £4 billion, in 1974 sterling, the level of their public sector borrowing requirement, on which they built their spending plans. From that, so many of their subsequent difficulties flowed. It is unreasonable of the Opposition to deny the Government the right to make assumptions about the Opposition's stated intentions of substance.

The Labour Government did not learn from their mistakes. After everything that they had done between 1974 and 1976, their public expenditure White Paper dated February 1976 began:

"we intend broadly to stabilise the level of resources taken by expenditure after 1976/77".

Those words are worth recording in the light of what happened later that year, and worth measuring against the pious words that the shadow Chancellor has latterly been uttering about his present intentions.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister referred to the privatisation of London Underground. The responses of the Opposition on the day that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced that were embarrassing. They were inept, irrelevant and primaeval. However, all was explained within a week, when Conservative Members received a letter from Mr. Jimmy Knapp explaining why he was against the privatisation. His very opposition has implications for the public finances.

The vacuum on health policy in the Labour party is equally embarrassing, and this time it cannot be covered up by promises about increasing public expenditure. The vacuum has been there a long time, but it was previously concealed by public expenditure promises. As was once said of Mr. Asquith:

"his well known lucidity of style was a positive disadvantage when he had nothing particular to say".

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

As for pensions, the Opposition's knee-jerk reaction to the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security was the vividest of demonstrations that, to mix my metaphors, beneath the skin-deep pieties, the leopard has not changed its spots.

The Opposition will say that, despite their policy vacuum, they enjoyed the confidence of the electorate in the Wirral. They have paid us the compliment of adopting, hip and thigh, the commanding policies of the Government on economic management—but their attitudes to markets remain profoundly ambiguous.

The Opposition's imprecise statements about public expenditure have smacked of a communitarianism from the other side of the Atlantic, and of Michel Albert's propositions from this side of it, with their moral feel-good factor. However, the trouble with those theories is the fact that they blunt the rigour of markets, and are incapable of accurate calibration.

I appreciate the fact that those theories are, in part, a reaction to the wilder intellectual propositions of the new right in the United States. Forty years ago, in a course at the Harvard business school entitled, "Business Responsibilities in American Society", I was brought up to believe in the tenet that a private corporation has responsibilities to customers, to employees and to the community at large, as well as to shareholders. All hon. Members have in their constituencies hundreds of companies that pursue exactly the same policies, from many motives, of which intelligent self-interest is not the least.

It is, I fear, the miasma of communitarianism towards which a patently under-prepared Opposition seek to seduce the country. That is why this debate, and the Deputy Prime Minister's powerful exposé, has been so valuable.

When I was in the Treasury, we had a saying that that which could not be measured did not exist. That proposition was once put to the test by the Foreign Office, which we all know and love, when there was concern about whether Mr. Ernest Bevin, who was then Foreign Secretary, would be able to get through the doorway between the main spare bedroom and the main spare bathroom in the Brussels embassy.

A telegram was sent to London saying:

"Please verify diameter of Secretary of State".

The reply demonstrated what many of us had long feared—that the Foreign Office is more literate than numerate:

"Unable verify diameter but circumference is 60 inches".

An inability to measure precisely is a hazard in the public finances, too. I quoted earlier the Bellman in "The Hunting of the Snark"—whose ending the House will recall. It is because the Opposition are pretending to be a Boojum, but we suspect that they are really a Snark, that we shall revisit this subject time and again before polling day.

8.38 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North–East): I am pleased to be following the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke). I was pleased, too, that he drew attention to the conference that he and I attended at Central hall, Westminster, earlier this week, which addressed the issue of the forgotten 30 per cent. Whatever the defects of its format may have been, it directed attention to a proper concern about the state of our nation.

The stark central fact facing the next Government, as they consider their policies for public expenditure, will be that Britain is more unequal today than it has ever been this century. The very rich have done brilliantly since 1979, but the hardest-up 10 per cent. are 17 per cent. worse off. That inequality is getting worse. Britain is becoming more divided and more troubled every day. At the coming election, the question facing every voter is whether to let that situation carry on getting worse, with the Conservative promises to scrap inheritance tax and capital gains tax—which are paid overwhelmingly by well-off people—or to elect a different Government who will put fairness first and will stop the huge handouts to the rich.

There is no doubt about the size of the task that we face. Study after study has found a growing gulf between the wealthiest and the poorest in Britain. The Institute for Fiscal Studies found in 1994 that the gap between the highest and the lowest wages in the United Kingdom was the biggest since records began. It reported that the wages of the top 10 per cent. of male earners rose from 1.67 times the median wage in 1979 to twice the median in 1993. Meanwhile, the wages of the lowest-earning 10 per cent. fell over the same period from 69 per cent. to 58 per cent. of the median.

Since 1980, earnings inequality has risen faster in Britain than in any other industrial country apart from the United States. We have the third highest proportion of low-paid workers after the United States and Canada. The top 20 per cent. of earners take 67 per cent. of total income, while the proportion taken by the bottom 20 per cent. has fallen from 14 per cent. to 9 per cent. The bottom 10 per cent. take just 2.5 per cent. of total income.

In a survey last year, 90 per cent. of people, including a majority even among the highest-earning groups, said that they believed that the gap between the highest and the lowest incomes was excessive. People know that that inequality is wrong. The Catholic bishops' recent document, "The Common Good", pointed out that a society in which the gap between the top and the bottom is so great is not meeting the common good. Having engineered the conditions in which inequality flourishes, the Government have stood aside and watched, refusing at times even to admit what has happened.

The Government's policies on public spending over 18 years have left a deeply divided nation. Crime flourishes as legitimate economic opportunities become scarcer and young people turn to other means to earn a living. The Deputy Prime Minister said—12 years ago, admittedly—that

"Against a background of high unemployment, the invitation to crime becomes more appealing. Idleness becomes a resentment that gives crime an indefensible normality."

He was right. I hope that he is as concerned as I am that in my borough of Newham in east London, 39 per cent. of young people under 25 are without a job and 45 per cent. of households contain nobody in employment.

The heart of my argument is that that yawning inequality harms everybody, not just those at the bottom of the scale. Through our taxes, we all pay for

unemployment and the price of economic failure. We all suffer if people are scared to go out at night because they think that they might be mugged. We all have to pay for the extra security to protect our homes from burglary. It is a remarkable fact that, whereas in 1979 we spent twice as much on education as we did on the costs of unemployment, today we are spending more on unemployment. We must shift that priority back. The central objective in our public expenditure policy must be to address the deepening inequality.

I was interested to see an article in Monday's *Financial Times* by a former United States Secretary of Labor. Under the heading, "The menace to prosperity. Widening inequality poses a threat to the US and other societies", he rightly pointed out that

"there is no escaping the underlying moral question, which is also a political one. . . . Are we, or are we not, still in this together?"

I have three central criticisms of the Government's public expenditure policy over the past 18 years, which has brought us to the position that we are in. First, too little has been spent on investment and too much on consumption. Secondly, too much has been spent on welfare and too little on education. Thirdly, in a rather different category, there has been too much secrecy around the decisions on how Government finances are spent.

There is a striking graph in last month's Bank of England inflation report, showing the proportion of gross domestic product committed to fixed investment in each year since the 1950s. It shows that since 1992, the proportion spent on fixed investment has been at its lowest levels since the mid-1950s. We have a desperately bad record on investment.

Mr. Brooke: I realise that the hon. Gentleman is talking in absolute sums, but I am sure that he would be the first to acknowledge that the absolute sum does not necessarily determine the return on the money.

Mr. Timms: I entirely accept that. My point is that the proportion of our GDP that goes in investment has been very low, particularly since 1992. That has made a big contribution to the problems that I am describing. My right hon. Friend the deputy leader of the Labour party pointed out—I think that I heard him correctly—that we are 19th out of 19 for investment in the OECD.

That is particularly true of public expenditure. The point has been made tellingly recently by Yvette Cooper of *The Independent*. Although the overall level of public spending as a proportion of GDP has not changed much in the past 20 years, the composition of it has. We are spending far less public money on investment—that can be explained only in part by privatisation having reduced the need for public investment—and far more on current consumption.

Yvette Cooper points out:

"Such low levels of investment (in both public and private sectors) are brewing up problems in the long term. Across the board from physical infrastructure to teenagers, from council houses to social insurance, money that could have been invested to give a return has been diverted to current expenditure instead. Sooner or later that was bound to cost us more."

On privatisation, she goes on:

"when assets were sold income streams were lost too, yet the money raised was not invested. Privatisation proceeds were used for tax cuts and to meet current spending bills instead. The gap between the value of the state's physical assets and its financial liabilities . . . has deteriorated badly as a result".

After what has happened, it is no wonder that Britain has had trouble meeting its bills and that the Government have been forced to raise taxes significantly since 1992.

The Government's principal response to the problem of inadequate publicly sponsored investment has been the private finance initiative. There are many questions about the way in which that initiative has been implemented and its effects so far. I have a number of questions for the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. The Treasury Committee said in January that it was sceptical about whether the £2.5 billion due to be spent under the PFI in the coming financial year would be achieved, given that by December only about half that amount had been committed. How much of that £2.5 billion has now been committed? According to the Red Book, even assuming that that figure of £2.5 billion is achieved, total publicly sponsored capital spending is due to fall by £300 million next year. Will the figure be even lower, because the £2.5 billion of PFI expenditure will not be achieved?

Another problem with the PFI is the undue secrecy that surrounds the deals. I shall come back to that point later when I talk more generally about the way in which the Government conduct the economy. I believe that hon. Members need to see the details of the deals that have been done, to establish the extent to which value for money has been achieved and to scrutinise properly the spending of taxpayers' money. The excuse for withholding the details from Parliament on the ground that the negotiating position of Departments' future deals would be compromised, is a licence for unnecessary secrecy.

I wonder whether the Chief Secretary will be able to say more about how the Government can justify that defence for secrecy. Will he confirm that the details of the Treasury building PFI redevelopment project will be released as soon as the final contract is signed? Many questions are being asked about that project.

In an earlier intervention, the Chief Secretary haltingly confirmed that not one of the major hospital PFI projects that have been announced has completed the financing deal. At the same time, transport projects under the PFI are surging ahead and apparently yielding 15 per cent. savings, which I welcome. That raises a concern about the extent to which spending priorities are being distorted by the PFI process. I wonder whether the Chief Secretary is concerned that some Departments where projects are well suited to the PFI model, such as Transport, are able to grab the lion's share of investment, while other key Departments are left starved of the necessary investment.

I am also concerned about the monitoring of future PFI commitments. The Department of Health said that it is not collecting the details of PFI commitments incurred by NHS trusts. If that is so, how are the commitments being monitored?

The fundamental problem with the PFI is that far too many square pegs are being bashed into round holes. We need a well-defined set of project types for which private finance is appropriate and those for which it is not—it must be understood by contractors and Departments—instead of the present assumption that everything should be privately financed unless it proves impossible to do a deal.

Another failing to which I want to draw attention is the fact that we spend too much money on welfare and too little on education. In 1978-79 we were spending

[Mr. Timms]

6 per cent. of our GDP on education and training and 2.5 per cent. on income-related benefits. Last year we were spending 5.6 per cent. on education and training and 5.5 per cent. on income-related benefits. Given what was said about education by the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South, I believe that it is important to emphasise that the proportion of our GDP being spent on education has fallen. This year, we shall be spending more on income-related benefits than on education and training. Those figures eloquently make the case for a windfall tax. We need to make a serious investment to shift people off welfare and into work, so that we can reduce the amount of GDP being spent on benefits and increase the amount going to education and training.

My third criticism is about the undue secrecy in the process. I believe that I am right to say that it was the current Secretary of State for Defence who announced in 1992 the process of fundamental expenditure reviews. We have only the haziest idea about what has happened to those reviews since that time. Very little has been published. The Treasury has published the results of its review and I congratulate it on doing so. The Department of Social Security has published a couple of background papers from its review, but beyond that, hardly anything has appeared.

There are big choices to be made about the future of our nation. We need a debate about what should be funded through taxation. Why are such debates permitted only in a closed Cabinet Committee? That is in nobody's interest. The Chief Secretary agreed with me yesterday in the Treasury Committee that there should be material in the public domain from the fundamental expenditure reviews, but it has not happened.

The next Government must do things differently and be much less secretive about such processes, because better policies will result. We could avoid such half-baked proposals as those which emerged yesterday on pensions. Pensions is a topic on which there needs to be consensus, not the bouncing about of semi-finished proposals.

I hope that we can go further and employ techniques such as citizens' juries or surveys using new communication technology and the world wide web. In that way, we can solicit proposals and views, to ensure that our policy proposals on spending are balanced, well thought through and, where appropriate, based on consensus.

Geoffrey Hulme of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy proposed recently that there should be the publication in early summer of information on departmental spending performances and plans. It could include information on how much average households in different income bands contribute to taxation and what they receive in services. Select Committees could comment on how the priorities should be adjusted.

It would be a bold step to publish the key elements of the dialogue between the Treasury and spending Departments, but discussions between the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England are now published, which would have been unthinkable a short time ago. I hope that the new steps that I have suggested could be taken, because there would be great benefit from wider parliamentary and public discussion.

The problems that I have identified with Government public spending policy are that we have had insufficient public investment and too much consumption, too much spent on welfare and not enough on education and far too much secrecy in decision making on public spending. The consequence of those problems is the deeply divided Britain that we have today. We need to set a new course for public spending policy, so that we can start to repair the damage that has been done.

8.56 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–East (Mr. Timms), who delivered a typically thoughtful speech. I shall return to one or two of his comments later.

As many hon. Members, at least those from the Opposition, have observed, today has been another Conservative Opposition day. Two weeks ago, we had the Prime Minister debating our policies on the constitution—a debate in which we were happy to join—and this week it is public spending. Next week, we were to debate another Opposition policy, that on pensions. It is an indictment of the Government that, rather than debate their policies, their record or their proposals if they were to secure a fifth term, in the dying days of this Parliament and possibly the dying days of this Government, they are reduced to debating our policies.

The fact that the Deputy Prime Minister opened the debate speaks volumes about the Government's current negative approach to politics. One might have thought that the Chancellor would expound the Government's position on public spending, but we got the Deputy Prime Minister instead. A good proportion of Ministers was with him—not in their Departments running the country or preparing for the future, but as part of a crowd scene, a large doughnut for a tired and uninspiring performance.

It is no surprise that, over the past few months, the nation has been treated to the sight of a tired lion lying down on a poster: clearly, the picture was taken in Conservative party central office where the lion had listened to what was going on and, having drawn its own conclusions, was simply waiting for the Conservatives to fade into opposition. They have given up and are fading away.

The contribution of the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton), who is sadly no longer here, was perhaps typical of the Conservatives' attitude: they simply deny the past and deny their record. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman took his lead from an article that the Prime Minister wrote in the *Financial Times* about 10 days ago. The article was not by a Tory Back Bencher or a junior member of the Government, but by the Prime Minister, no less, yet it simply denied the past and the Government's record to try to claw back some ground.

The Prime Minister said that we had a low-tax environment, even though the Government have increased taxes on 22 occasions since the last general election. He had the gall to say that he had broken the trend towards big government, yet, as we have heard many times this evening, the share of Government spending has remained remarkably constant over the past 18 years at 42 per cent. of gross domestic product. He went on to say that he had put the growth of social security benefits on a downward path, yet they have increased by 88 per cent. since the

Government took office. He said that the debt burden was under control, yet he has doubled debt since becoming Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister then repeated the same old bogus Conservative allegations about our proposals and said that we had not denied or withdrawn them. He knows full well, as does the Chief Secretary, that the bogus allegations about our policies have been denied right from the start, because they are nonsense, and the Tory party knows it.

My understanding is that the Tories' starting point was to get a figure that they could use against us and then to look around for a way of validating it. That is typical of the way in which they attack us. Last November, they had a figure of £30 billion; it dropped to £12 billion 10 days ago; and now it is back up to £30 billion. Their attacks have no credibility and their entire credibility is flawed because no one believes what they say on tax or about their own spending record. It is not surprising that no one believes the Conservatives when they attack our record.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton–under–Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) said in an excellent speech that we do not have to use our imaginations or to fantasise because we know the Conservatives' record. To use his phrase, a load of facts are there for everyone to see. Let us compare what the Government said in the past about public expenditure with their record.

In 1979, the Conservative election manifesto said:

"The state takes too much of the nation's income; its share must be steadily reduced."

The share that the state takes today is 42.5 per cent. and it was 42.25 per cent. when we left office.

In 1996, the present Chancellor pledged that he would get public spending down. He should examine his record: he has never achieved that aim. The only time that the Government reduced the share of public expenditure was during the three years of the unsustainable Lawson boom of the late 1980s.

In a rare moment of candour—I understand that it was a semi-private occasion—the Prime Minister said in Chelmsford last October that the

"economic blot on the horizon"

that concerned him was

"the size of the fiscal deficit. That is a problem."

Indeed, it is a problem. All the evidence shows that to be true. The under-performance of the economy has pushed up the cost of social security and other public spending programmes associated with economic failure. That is why the share of public spending is almost exactly the same as it was 18 years ago.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–East said, public investment programmes, which are essential to underpin a successful economy, have been cut to stave off an even worse deterioration in the public finances. The private finance initiative—the partnership between the public and private sectors, which I and my right hon. Friend the deputy leader of the Labour party so warmly endorse—has not effected a reduction in public spending because of the Government's failure to manage the programme.

The result of that failure has been that the tax burden has grown. On present plans, it is set to rise up to the end of the decade. The surge of borrowing in the 1990s over which the Prime Minister has presided has left us with a legacy of vastly increased debt service costs. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton–under–Lyne, during his excellent chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee, has drawn attention not only to economic failure, because of the failure of Government policies, but to a legacy of Tory waste.

My right hon. Friend gave some examples, and I want to draw the attention of the House to one or two about which we did not hear much from the Deputy Prime Minister. The BSE crisis cost the taxpayer £3.5 billion. The poll tax cost nearly £4 billion in administration alone. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has something to say about that. I understand that one of the ways in which he worked himself back into favour with Lady Thatcher was by being one of two Ministers who were willing to write out on the back of an envelope a replacement for the rates system. We got the poll tax.

The British public had to pay for those failures, whether in agriculture, taxation or the cones hotline, which perhaps sums up the Prime Minister and will be his enduring contribution. That is a testament to the failure of the Prime Minister and to the inability of the Conservatives to control public spending or manage it appropriately. Imagine, a cones hotline that resulted in each telephone call costing £5,000; what an indictment of the Government.

Capital spending also suffered. It is worth reflecting that, under the last Labour Government, £1 in every £6 was spent on investment. Under the Tories, investment has accounted for only £1 in £13. That is an indictment of the Government, because public sector capital spending is one way in which Government can assist economic activity. In 1992, the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), claimed that he was protecting capital programmes, despite cuts in other expenditures. However, the Government's record shows that he did not live up to his promises. Publicly sponsored capital expenditure will be 12 per cent. in real terms, below its peak in 1992 and 1993.

The Government have broken their promises on investment and we are paying a heavy price for it, because the cost of economic failure has to be met by higher taxation and higher borrowing. The Government have no positive proposals on that. Instead, in the brief moments that we touched on our proposals to get people off welfare and back into work, which must be good economically and socially, the Government would not engage in the debate. They are not interested; they are prepared to write off a generation and pay the cost of that failure; or rather they expect the British people to pay it.

The cost to the country has been dear. Our borrowing has increased substantially. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said, it is worth bearing it in mind that the Government have had to borrow £66 billion more than they promised to borrow at the time of the last general election. In each year since that election, the Government have failed miserably to meet their borrowing targets. No wonder people do not believe their promises on borrowing, taxation or spending. That is a testament to failure.

I admire the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) for his loyalty, which is no more than one would expect from a senior Member of

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

his stature. However, if he cared to look at the Government's record over the past few years, he would see that we are paying a heavy price for the failure of their economic policies. The interest on Britain's debt means that we are spending more on servicing debt than on defence. What an indictment of a Conservative Government.

Mr. Brooke: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: In a moment. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will attend to this question as he faces the electorate, as I believe that he intends to. How will he explain to electors that each household in his constituency is paying, on average, more than £1,100 to service the debt that his colleagues have run up over the past few years?

Mr. Brooke: Given the comparison that the hon. Gentleman made between debt and defence, does he recall that, under the last Labour Government, more people were employed by the Inland Revenue than by the Royal Navy?

Mr. Prescott: That is even truer now.

Mr. Darling: As my right hon. Friend says, that is probably truer now, especially as the largest cuts in the defence budget were made by the Conservatives. Despite everything that they have said about defence being safe in their hands, rather like the national health service, they have sliced into the defence programme.

The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South must know that probably the second largest demonstrations in the past 18 years—the largest were those against the poll tax in places such as Tunbridge Wells—were those against the cuts in the regiments. I particularly remember those in north-east Scotland. He did not answer my point about debt. The Government's failure to keep their promises on spending has resulted in increasing borrowing, increased debt servicing costs and, of course, a major increase in taxation.

In the old days—when I first became a Member of the House and, I am sure, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East became a Member—whenever a debate took place on the economy, the one thing about which every Conservative Member spoke was tax. We have not heard a word about it tonight. No wonder, because taxation has become rather an awkward subject for the Conservative party.

In 1992, the Prime Minister said that the difference between the two parties was clear; the Conservatives would cut direct taxes. That did not happen. He said, in a memorable phrase:

"We have no plans and no need to increase the impact of VAT",

but VAT has now been imposed on domestic gas and electricity. No wonder people around the country take with a large pinch of salt the Government's claim that they do not want to extend VAT to food or anything else. At the last election, they said that they would not extend VAT, yet they did.

The Prime Minister said that he did not see any need to increase the burden of taxation. Yet the House will recall that he admitted the day after the election to his closest circle of colleagues that, within 12 months, the Tory Government would be deeply unpopular. He knew it because he knew that the prospectus on which the Government had fought the election would not stand up. He knew that they would have to put up taxes. Yet the Government did not tell people that that was what they proposed to do.

The Government's own Red Book confirms that the burden of taxation has risen since 1979 when they took office from 35 per cent. to 36.25 per cent. this year. Indeed, most people earning less than £70,000 a year will be paying more tax under the Tories. The tax bombshell that the Tories were proud to warn about at the last election has blown up in their faces. That is one of the reasons why they are losing by-elections and heading for defeat at the next election. They stood explicitly on a platform of cutting taxes, yet they increased taxes. More tax on income, more tax on spending and more tax in total. After 22 Tory tax rises, a typical family is paying more than £2,000 more in tax.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman has not been in all night. As he has taken the trouble to come in for the closing speeches, perhaps he would like to get his name in the credits.

Mr. Jenkin: Does the hon. Gentleman support the European social democratic model?

Mr. Darling: My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East made the important point that if one compares Britain's growth record in the past 18 years with that of other countries in Europe, one sees that many of our competitor countries have done much better than us. As my right hon. Friend acknowledged, France and Germany have particular difficulties at the moment. We had particular difficulties four or five years ago. What people in Britain find dispiriting and depressing is how much Conservative Members now gloat about the difficulties that other European countries have.

I remind those Conservative Members who are still here that we trade with the rest of Europe. It is not in the interests of Britain to see Europe remain in recession. The sooner it recovers, the better it will be for Britain. What sort of a Government are so torn by internal fighting within their ranks that they invite the British people to delight in the misfortunes of other countries? What sort of outward-looking country is that?

Let us return to tax. Those of my colleagues who served on the Standing Committee which considered the Finance Bill will recall that we were deeply disappointed that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury did not see fit to join us this year. As I did not see him around the House and found that he was not included by the Tory party chairman in the line-up at press conferences called to denounce us, I took the trouble to smoke him out. I went to his constituency to try to find him. He was not there. They were all crying out, "Where's Wally?" There was no sign of the Chief Secretary.

I did find something. I found the last copy of the Chief Secretary's manifesto from the last election. It is a collector's item. It is so valuable that I have brought only

a copy into the Chamber. The original is now in a safe. There is only one copy because he has retrieved them all. I know why he did that, because his comments at the last election typify the difficulty that the Tory party has got itself into. The House will recall that, then, all the Conservatives said that they would cut taxes, but the Chief Secretary went a little bit further than that. He said not only that tax would be cut but that it would be cut

"with 5 pence more to come".

How wrong can one get it? The Government put taxes up by 7p, so to get tax down by 5p more, they would have to make cuts for many a year. That typifies the Government's attitude—promises lightly given, with no intention of delivering them.

Although the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell referred to the high penal rates of taxation over which Governments of the past of both political colours have presided—very much in the past—he had little to say about the high penal rates of effective taxation that face people coming off benefit into work. Is there not a contrast between the unfunded pledge of the Tory party to abolish capital gains tax and inheritance tax at a cost of £4.5 billion, with half the gain going to fewer than 5,000 people—that is the Government's promise to the British people—and our objective to lower the starting rate of income tax to reduce the barriers in order to get people off benefit into work? That is good for them and extremely good for public finances because people will stop claiming benefit, and start paying tax. That makes for a better and more efficient country.

The costs of economic failure are substantial. The deep feeling of insecurity which permeates all levels of society, no matter how people are placed and no matter what their earnings, is having economic as well as political effects. Nearly 11 million people have had a spell of unemployment since 1990. People know that they should worry about their future, partly because the Government are simply drifting along with no clear sense of where they are going or what their role is, let alone the role of the country in the future.

Of course people are quite right to be worried about the Government and what they would do if they carried on creating economic failure. Before Christmas, the Chief Secretary and I took part in a television programme when the right hon. Gentleman said:

"There's no secret that the Conservatives, right back to 1979"—

have preferred to raise tax through indirect taxation. The lessons are quite clear.

As for the future, the Chief Secretary is, as ever, helpful. No doubt the House will be familiar with the interview he gave to " Milton Keynes on Sunday" a short while ago. The reporter asked:

"Are you going to tell us: 'Read my lips; no new taxes?'

Mr Waldegrave said: 'No, I won't do that. One cannot tell what may happen which would need some action.'"

He has learnt since the last election—no more promises of 5p more to come. Now he says that he cannot tell what may happen—indeed he cannot, because he knows the Government's record. He also knows something else. We have heard a lot about spending commitments, and it is worth reminding the House that the Tory party has been making a number of spending commitments, but it cannot say where the necessary funding will come from.

At the end of January, the Prime Minister announced what he called a "sharematch" initiative, which is meant to extend employee share ownership. I support that, but where will the £50 million come from? He has also said that he intends to reduce the uniform business rate, but that could cost anything between £500 million and £1.5 billion. The Government's decision on the royal yacht told us a lot about their strategy and their attitude to public spending. That decision was designed, as the Secretary of State for Defence said, to wrong-foot the Opposition, but that was something else that blew up in his face. The Government want to extend the number of cadet corps in schools, but that will cost £1.5 billion. Where will the money come from? *[Interruption.]* The Chief Secretary says that they have given no costings for that. The Government are always attacking us and claiming that we have given no costings.

Mr. Waldegrave: Will the hon. Gentleman give way for a second?

Mr. Darling: Do not worry, it will be just for a second, but in a moment. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us the exact cost of implementing the proposal to extend the number of cadet corps in schools? Where will that money come from?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is not that it has not been costed, but that we have made no new policy in that area.

Mr. Darling: It was in *The Daily Telegraph*. The Government have made no secret about it; it was all over the news outlets. Talk about hinting, giving an impression and failure to deny. The Tory party was quite happy to give the impression that it wanted to extend cadet corps. Perhaps it is an aspiration. Perhaps it is an aim. Whatever it is, we do not know the cost of it.

That is typical of the Government's attitude to tonight's debate. The Deputy Prime Minister, the Chief Secretary and the Prime Minister have on numerous occasions on television and radio made bogus allegations against us, yet when we ask them where money is to come from—for example, to fund pensions with a cumulative cost of £150 billion, to fund the royal yacht, or to extend all the schemes that the Conservatives come up with and will continue to come up with between now and the election—they cannot tell us. In their heart of hearts, they know that the game is up and that no one will ever ask them again where the money will come from. They know that what awaits them after the election is not running the country but squabbling among themselves and fighting for the succession to whatever is left.

I was surprised that the Deputy Prime Minister did not treat us to his usual exhortations and encouragement, saying that we face the best economic prospects for a generation. I do not know of what that generation is—a normal generation is 10 or 15 years, but he might be talking about a generation of fruit flies for all I know. The fact is that, when we compare this country with others in Europe and the rest of the world, we realise that we are not doing as well as the Conservatives would have us believe.

We have one of the highest inflation rates in Europe—our long-term inflation rates are higher than most of our competitor countries. Yes, unemployment has been falling, but only one person in three coming off the unemployment list has actually found employment. The Conservatives claim that living standards are rising, yet

[Mr. Darling]

the Chief Secretary admitted last year that people's take-home pay had fallen over the previous few years. In addition, there is the overlay of job insecurity—it is only the President of the Board of Trade who says that that is simply a myth. We are told that we have the fastest growth rate in Europe, yet if we look at the record for the Conservatives' period in office, we see that growth has been less than was achieved by the last Labour Government. A substantial part of inward investment comes, not from new companies coming in and setting up, but simply from takeovers of privatised utilities.

By staging this debate, which has now petered out, the Government have demonstrated their bankruptcy of thought. They have nothing more to say. They continue to make wild allegations and empty promises, but they are doing so before an increasingly sceptical public who know that their record on growth, inflation and borrowing is one of failure. After 18 years, people are entitled to a change: they are looking for a Government who have a clear idea, not only of the role of the Government, but of the role of the country in Europe and in the world; a Government who are prepared to end the drift; a Government who are prepared to enter into partnerships between public and private sectors; and, above all, a Government who have at heart the interests of the many, rather than the few. People do not believe the Conservatives and they do not trust the Conservatives. They are looking for a change and that is what they will get with a new Labour Government.

9.22 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. William Waldegrave): The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) overran his speaking plans by about 85 per cent., which I suppose will be the sort of overrun in the expenditure plans if he ever becomes Chief Secretary, so I shall not emulate him in that respect. He might profit by reading the speeches and articles of his hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on the truth about security of employment and pensions—a subject to which I shall return later. The hon. Member for Birkenhead has the sense and the courage to recognise that the measures introduced yesterday are basically right.

My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) made the point that the fundamental shift that has occurred during the course of this Government is that the worsening cycles that took place during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s have been reversed. In every one of those cycles, unemployment was higher at the worst point and inflation was higher at the subsequent recovery point than in the previous cycle. In 1975–76, Mr. Peter Jay, the then son-in-law of the then Prime Minister, wrote a series of famous articles in *The Times* warning that if that worsening widening of the cycle continued, we would face catastrophe. I believe that his then father-in-law began to pay attention, because there was a change in atmosphere towards the end of that Government—a change in which the present Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), probably played a part.

Since then, that worsening series of troughs and peaks has steadily evened out. I agree with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South—

Mr. Darling: Central.

Mr. Waldegrave: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. I agree with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central that we should take no delight in the problems on the continent of Europe, our major trading partner. The quicker that a recovery is found there, by a return to the roots of liberal economics on which those countries established their success after the war, the better for all of us. They now find themselves in the position in which we found ourselves once upon a time: each trough is deeper in terms of unemployment, each recovery higher in terms of inflation. We have reversed that trend in this country. It is part of my argument that part of the reason for that is that we have turned round the trend in the growth of public expenditure.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central is extremely skilful at focusing on the short term. I want to direct him to the wider picture. As my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South said, under Labour and Conservative Governments in the 1950s and 1960s, the trend of public expenditure was up, as it was in other countries. It works equally well whether one measures that growth from peak to peak or trough to trough or draws the average line. The peak in the 1950s was 37 per cent., that in the 1960s was 42 per cent., that in the 1970s was 47 per cent., that in the 1980s was 45 per cent. and that in the 1990s was 43 per cent. The troughs reveal the same pattern. Unquestionably, there has been a long-term turn-around in that trend line.

Other European countries marched in step with us upwards and continued upwards after 1979. That is why they now find themselves with public expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product at 50 per cent. and in some cases 60 per cent., with the big countries at 50 per cent. or slightly higher, whereas we have separated from that pack and have returned to a clear trend line, which will be continued if a Conservative Government are returned to power.

Through the 1980s, the underlying level of spending fell by about 4 per cent. of GDP—about £28 billion. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), the spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, laid before us a strategy on these matters. It may be my fault, but it was the first time that I had heard it. It was a clear strategy—relatively clear, at any rate. He said that he wanted to hold the growth rate of all public expenditure programmes, except two, below the trend growth rate of the economy. If the growth rate of the economy is about 2½ per cent., which may be slowly but surely increasing, most programmes should be kept below that. The hon. Gentleman would finance the remaining two—health and education—with higher taxes, but their trend growth should be higher.

Broadly, I take it—I may be simplifying slightly—that the hon. Member for Gordon believes that the proportion of GDP spent by the public sector should be broadly in tune with overall growth in GDP as a whole, with some programmes growing more slowly but two programmes growing faster. I may be putting words in the hon. Gentleman's mouth, but perhaps that means that Liberal Democrat policy is that public expenditure should broadly

shadow the growth in the economy, so it should stay at about 42 per cent. That is a perfectly legitimate policy; I shall posit some arguments as to why it is not a good one, but it is at least a policy.

As usual, the Labour party obscured things. Labour Members made brilliant debating points on the short term—brilliant knockabout stuff about what someone said on Tuesday that was contradicted by someone three years before, and so on—but presented no underlying policy.

The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) has a policy all right, because he, I believe, is a proper socialist. I guess that he wants the public sector to take a bigger role. I do not think that I would be putting words in his mouth to say that. *[Interruption.]* I just happened to notice the hon. Gentleman there, and I thought that I would record for his constituents the fact that he was there. I suspect—I may be wrong—that he is someone who actually believes in the public sector.

Nobody knows what the policy of the Front Bench is. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Gordon says that the hon. Member for Kingswood is deeply offended at being accused of being a socialist. I apologise for that. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, however, has no policy. He did not match the commitment of the hon. Member for Gordon. He did not say that he thought that the share should be roughly what it is now, that it should go up, that it should go down—he did not say where it should go. We are, as usual, at sea with regard to the fundamental philosophy and principle of the Labour party on this matter, as on practically every other matter.

Our policy is clear, and I will state it. We will continue what we have undertaken since 1979. We will continue with that downward trend in public expenditure. Of course the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central can point out that at a certain point in the cycle it will be higher than at other points, but there is a clearly downward-trending line.

Mr. Darling: Can the Chief Secretary tell us the percentage of spending that he is aiming for? That would be helpful.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall return to that. There is a difference between short-term targets and what one intends in the future, but I would hope that the growth of public spending could be kept below the growth of the trend rate of the economy as a whole over time.

Mr. Miller: What percentage?

Mr. Waldegrave: That depends how far ahead one looks. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central thinks that he is being frightfully clever by trying to prove a difference between me and the Chancellor. He thinks, rightly, that I said that it would be splendid if we could achieve 35 per cent. whereas the Chancellor spoke about 40 per cent. next year. There is nothing clever about that. We will achieve 40 per cent. and then we will go on with the trend line.

Mr. Darling: I am not trying to be frightfully clever, as the Chief Secretary puts it. He will recall that two or three years ago he said that he was one of those in the Tory party who believed that the figure that should be aimed at was about 35 per cent., and that the Chancellor referred to those people as being from the slash and burn school. There is a significant difference between 35 per cent. and 40 per cent. We are entitled to hear from the Chief Secretary where he wants to get to in percentage terms. Does he still adhere to his figure of 35 per cent. or not?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is not rational to talk about a fixed end target. One must examine the growth of the economy over time, and the relationship. I am speaking the same sort of language as the Liberal Democrats, who were not trying to score silly points, but were setting out a policy.

Mr. Miller *rose—*

Mr. Waldegrave: I was going to refer to the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller). We have heard two kinds of speeches. We heard thoughtful and interesting speeches about the nature of public expenditure and the relationship between public expenditure and the economy—for example, from the hon. Member for Newham, North–East (Mr. Timms), but outstandingly from my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South and from my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), who is no longer here and has explained to me why he cannot be present.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston, if I may say so, made a more old-fashioned speech. He took two areas of spending which he likes and lobbied for them. He said that he wanted more spending on science. We have a good record on spending on science. It will encourage him to know that research and development expenditure in the United Kingdom is 2.19 per cent. of GDP. The figures are from 1994, which is the last year for which the comparative figures are available for all the other countries. The UK figure was above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average of 2.15 per cent. and above the European Union average of 1.91 per cent. Spending on the science base has been protected and has increased in real terms.

The speech of the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston was a bid for more local authority spending and more science spending. Fine. It showed the difficulty that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central would have if he ever found himself in my office, because no one speaks from his Back Benches, as my right hon. and hon. Friends do, with an instinctual commitment to the control of spending. All his Back Benchers speak for lobbies and for increased spending—quite honourably, but that is what they came into politics to do.

Mr. Miller: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will read my speech in *Hansard*. My argument in the context of the Roslin institute is that the Government structure for that institute means, first, an increase in health costs; and, secondly, other problems such as unemployment. The key to the institute's success must be creating the right financial infrastructure that allows the public and private sectors to work together successfully. That structure has not been established, yet we are seeing cuts now.

Mr. Waldegrave: As always, the hon. Gentleman's argument requires more money. If he were to sit in my chair for a week or two, he would find that every spending

[Mr. Waldegrave]

bid was couched in those terms—I expect that the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne remembers that. When I was in the private sector, my company used to sell things to the Government. We would argue, "If you don't buy our products, people will be unemployed and it will be more expensive for you." That seemed to be a jolly good way of trying to sell our products. However, the Labour Government at the time were not much convinced by our arguments, and I am afraid that the Opposition would remain unconvinced by the hon. Gentleman's assertions.

Our belief in cutting spending does not derive from the advice of our public relations people. Labour's PR people have advised it that Labour lost the last election because it was perceived as a high-spending party, so Opposition Members now try to disguise their underlying beliefs. Our belief in low spending derives from our fundamental philosophy: we believe that the index of spending by Government is a good indicator of whether the balance between Government and the individual and Government and private institutions is correct. When spending gets too high and goes on growing, we believe that it damages individual liberty and independent institutions.

We believe also that it is economically beneficial to diminish the weight of public spending, and there is increasing evidence in support of that view. An interesting paper published by the International Monetary Fund in 1996 showed that the best and safest way of balancing budgets was achieved not by increasing taxes, but by cutting spending. That delivers longer-term balance to fiscal affairs, with all the attendant benefits. A separate IMF study—I shall be happy to send these publications to any Labour Members who wish to read them—made the more fundamental point that small Governments exhibit greater regulatory efficiency and inhibit less the functioning of labour markets, the participation in the formal economy and the innovativeness of the private sector. To put it in ordinary language: they produce more jobs.

I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Newham, North-East, the bishops and everyone else that job creation lies at the heart of the debate about the proper way to run an economy. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister completely demolished the Opposition's old-style, subsidised jobs proposal. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central claimed that we would not debate that issue, but it was debated to such good effect this afternoon that my right hon. Friend demolished the Opposition's argument totally and there was no comeback possible from the deputy leader of the Labour party on that point.

In the first half of my political life, I watched Labour Governments trying to subsidise jobs and creating long-term unemployment. The trick did not work then, and it will not work now. The Opposition argue that they would somehow miraculously turn history upside down and tax one group of companies—which would inevitably destroy jobs in those companies—in order to invent subsidised jobs elsewhere. They could not do that. They would go down the social chapter route, destroying jobs with the minimum wage—as the deputy leader of the Labour party had the honesty to admit—and destroying jobs by joining in a whole range of job-destroying initiatives that come from central Europe. They would end up with higher unemployment, and thereby the central core of Labour's argument would be destroyed.

The argument as to who is better at creating jobs is almost being proven experimentally—in so far as we could ever have such an experiment. We watched countries in Europe—especially Germany—lead the way after the war with good, basic liberal economics, as the deputy leader of the Labour party said. That is what Ludwig Erhard said and what he stood for. However, when asked about this matter at the end of his life, he said that he regretted confusing the issue by talking about the social market. He said, "I wish I had not said that, because markets did the magic in Germany," and that is true.

Germany has now got itself into a cycle where it has placed such weight on its employers and put such costs on employment that it is destroying jobs, not creating them. The head of the German BDI—in the presence, I think, of the leader of the Labour party—made a famous speech contrasting the difference between the Government in Germany and the Government in Britain, to the favour of the latter. He knew very well what the situation was. Herr Henkel said:

"One of the Governments,"—

the United Kingdom Government—

"has steadily reduced state influence. The other,"—

Germany—

"has done no such thing . . . In Germany, the ratio of public spending to GNP has risen to 50 per cent. In Great Britain, it has fallen to 42.2 per cent . . . In Germany, average taxes on retained profits are 64.9 per cent. In Great Britain the figure is 33 per cent."

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), in an eloquent speech, made those points extremely well.

Labour has a fundamental misunderstanding. It has an extraordinary capacity to pick up the wrong ideas at the wrong time. When there was real danger to this country from enemies, Labour Members were pacifists—the present leader of the Labour party came in on the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament ticket—but when there are no such immediate threats, they become very brave warriors, and they are now very much in favour of nuclear weapons, the armed forces and so on. When the German model was working, they were against it. They did not care for it then, but now it has stopped working, and because it has gone wrong, with their absolutely compelling eye for picking up the wrong idea at the wrong time, they are in favour of it.

I am afraid that that is the story of Labour's policy on almost every principal area. Labour Members pick up yesterday's ideas just when they have stopped working.

Mr. Dalyell: If the Chief Secretary imagines that the Germans will abandon the social chapter and they do not, surely the time will come, sooner or later, when our partners will say that the British cannot go on having their cake and eating it, and there will be consequences in our relations with our trading partners that may not be very comfortable.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am not entirely sure that I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but if he is saying that the European compulsion on the Germans would be such that they could not liberalise their markets in the way

in which they now know they must, so that instead they put the same costs on us, there would indeed be severe difficulties. It is thanks to the opt-out that the Prime Minister negotiated that that danger is greatly minimised.

Happily, powerful forces are at work in Germany—arguing quite the contrary to what the Labour party thinks that they are arguing—and beginning to say, like the head of the BDI, that they have to liberalise their markets, that they have to lift the costs off industry, and that they have to make Germany competitive again, and then Germany will once again become a formidable competitor. I have no doubt about that. The quicker that happens, the better, because competitive trade is a positive sum game. We all benefit if the German economy grows fast.

Mr. Darling: Will the Chief Secretary give way on that point?

Mr. Waldegrave: Briefly.

Mr. Darling: This is a debate that the Government chose to hold, so let us have a debate.

Does it not strike the Chief Secretary and the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt)—whichever bit of the Wirral that we did not win—as a contradiction that the social chapter has nothing whatever to do with the rigidities in the labour market of which many people in other member states are critical? Nobody wants to import those rigidities. Indeed, the whole thrust of what the Chief Secretary and his right hon. Friend were saying is that many people in Germany, France and Spain recognise that those rigidities have to be addressed to make those countries competitive. Does not that suggest that, far from writing them into the social chapter, there is a movement in Europe to recognise that the competitive threat in the future will come not from intra-Europe but from other parts of the world? Nobody wants to import those unnecessary rigidities into this country.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman has made—with his customary style but on this occasion without his usual intelligence—my exact point: the Labour party is probably signing up to that policy just when it is falling to pieces in the hands of the people who invented it. I thought that that was what I had just said. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to think about it a little.

We have managed to follow a policy that has brought the long-term spending trend down at the same time as protecting our principal priorities for spending. Spending on health has gone up in real terms every year since 1979. That did not happen under the last Labour Government. One year, Lord Barnett was compelled to make a real cut in the NHS budget. As has been pointed out, spending per pupil in nursery, primary and secondary schools has risen in real terms by 50 per cent. since 1979. Spending on law and order has doubled.

Although my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage is not in his place, I must comment on his most interesting speech. He gave us some extremely wise advice. He gave Front Benchers a warning that I hope we will all heed—that we should rule out nothing before the Dearing committee reports, as we may need to make fundamental changes in the financing of higher education.

The Labour party has opposed all the reforms that have enabled us to match the expenditure increases with a declining trend of public spending. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister spoke about privatisation, so I shall not cover the issues again. There was a touching moment when an Opposition Member spoke about the selling of income streams. That applied in one or two cases, but mostly it was the selling of loss making. There has been a huge turn-around. There is now a benefit to the taxpayer of about £2.5 billion a year in tax receipts whereas there had been a huge burden on the taxpayer. Of course, Labour opposed all those measures.

The civil service is smaller. For the first time since the second world war it is now below 500,000. There has been a range of positive reforms, including the single regeneration budget challenge funding principle which the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston did not much like—or at least I took that to be his argument. Those methods of challenge funding have led to far greater productivity, as has the partnership between central and local government in the projects in which they are investing.

Our plans are sustainable. The plans in the Red Book maintain spending increases of about the same level over the next three years as those we have achieved in the past three. There is not the slightest chance that Labour could match them.

As we have already pointed out, Labour Members pretend not to understand the difference between our counter-arguments in respect of £12 billion and £30 million. In the first two years in which Labour has allegedly committed itself to our figures, there is a hole in expenditure and income which would leave a Labour Government £12 billion adrift. If Labour introduced any additional spending plans in those years, the gap would be worse.

I believe that £30 billion over five years is a perfectly reasonable estimate. One of the more independent commentators, Peter Riddell of *The Times*, took me to task on that issue. He said that I was exaggerating the extent of Labour's spending commitments and that the figure was nothing like £30 billion. He estimated that, over five years, a Labour Government would probably spend about 3 per cent. of GDP more than the Conservatives. As 3.5 per cent. of GDP would amount to £30 billion, we do not seem to be in any disagreement.

Labour has opposed every one of our major saving measures, including the criminal injuries compensation scheme which saves £200 million, measures relating to asylum seekers which save £300 million, housing benefit reforms which save £600 million and measures affecting benefits for single parents which save £200 million. Labour denounced all those reforms, often virulently.

The Leader of the Opposition gave us a rather good example of how the Opposition operate in these matters. On "The World At One" he was asked whether he would stick to our plans to make savings of £200 million—

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: If the hon. Gentleman will let me finish the argument, he may wish to comment on what the right hon. Gentleman said.

When he was asked whether he would stick to our plans that save £200 million by the end of the period, the Leader of the Opposition said no. Reasonably enough, we took that to be a pledge that he would replace that spending.

[Mr. Waldegrave]

Labour then issued a piece of paper headed, as so many of them are, "Lies". It said that the latest lie put out by the Conservatives was that

"Labour will spend £170 million on stopping changes to lone parents' benefits."

It does not seem unfair to me that if the Leader of the Opposition answered that question no, we should assume that his answer carried some weight. The only person who appears to be lying, although that is inconceivable—the person accused in that Labour document, at any rate—is not me but the Labour leader. That is how Labour operates: it has one answer for one audience, and another answer for another audience.

Mr. Bruce: Does the Chief Secretary not acknowledge that it is perfectly reasonable for Opposition parties to oppose a change but not necessarily be committed to reversing it? After all, they are trying to prevent the change from being made in the first place.

Given the vast expenditure on consultancies that has ballooned under the present Government, to which the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee drew attention—more than £1 billion—and the massive increase in spending on publicity and advertising, does the Chief Secretary think that it might be more appropriate for those people, rather than single mothers, to take a little of the spending cut?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I cited the change that the Labour leader mentioned only because he said in public that he would reverse it.

I find what the hon. Gentleman said—and what was said by the distinguished Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne—very encouraging. As Chief Secretary, I know that there are plenty more savings to be made. That is why we can implement our plans: that is why the plans in the Red Book are realistic. That is why there should be no doubt that we will continue our record of the last three or four years of maintaining the growth of public spending well below the growth of the economy.

People are beginning to accept that Labour will tax and spend more highly. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) let the cat out of the bag, supported by the deputy Chief Whip, and, yesterday, by a distinguished contribution from that wise man and good friend Lord Barnett, whose speech I read very closely. He knows what will happen if there is a Labour Government: they will tax and spend more. Of course, he would probably welcome that, because he has probably stuck to his old principles.

The fact that there are so many other taxes, as well as income tax, that a Labour Government could put up led the hon. Member for Oldham, West to say that the position was less bleak than it seemed. I found that most enjoyable. In the more robust and ordinary language of *The Sun*,

"Mr. Brown still has a lot to tell us. Like where the money for his colleagues' spending pledges will come from."

The truth is that we have won the argument about how to manage economies. Labour Members have broadly accepted our argument: they do not understand it, but they no longer argue against the liberal economics that most of them came into politics to oppose. We have won the argument about spending, and the argument about the economy. As *The Guardian* put it,

"There is no doubt that if Mr. Blair wins the election he will inherit the most healthy economy any Labour Government has ever had. This time it won't be possible to blame the previous administration for any subsequent failures"—

although the Labour party is attempting to use the alibi of the books' not being open, and so on.

Lord Desai wrote:

"Labour's biggest obstacle is the economy. It is in great shape. There is steady growth and low inflation."

When the "Today" programme put that quotation, or a similar quotation, to the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), he said, "Oh well, Lord Desai is only a Lord." That is not Lord Desai's fault; it was the Labour party that made him a Lord.

The battle of ideas has been won by the Conservative party. Now, interestingly, we are also winning the battle on pensions. Let me remind Opposition Front Benchers—who are talking more nonsense to the square minute about pensions and the future of the welfare state than I would have believed imaginable—of what Whistler said to Oscar Wilde. When Oscar Wilde said, after Whistler had said something witty, "I wish I'd said that," Whistler replied, "You will, Oscar, you will." I predict that, in six months, a year or two years, the Labour party will be following us down the path to funding the old-age pension.

The debate has been fascinating for the dearth of ideas offered by the Opposition. The only contributions of any intellectual merit that we are hearing from Labour on these matters come from the hon. Member for Birkenhead, and not, I fear, from Front Benchers. Nevertheless, we have enjoyed debating with them today. Nothing is more enjoyable that debating with the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)—although I thought today that he was not quite at his best. He was in no danger of being criticised in the words of the quotation about Asquith that my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South produced. It was said that Asquith's elegance of style—or was it his clarity of style?—made it difficult for him when he had nothing to say. The right hon. Gentleman did not find that the clarity of his style made it difficult for him to say nothing. This has been a good debate which, intellectually and on every other level, has been won by the Conservative side of the House.

Mr Richard Ottoway (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion. *Motion, by leave, withdrawn.*

FINANCE BILL

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the practice of the House as to the intervals between stages of Bills brought in upon Ways and Means Resolutions, more than one stage of the Finance Bill may be taken at any sitting of the House.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 12th March, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents), the Speaker shall put the Questions on the Motions in the names of Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Secretary Forsyth and Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew relating to Representation of the People and Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew relating to Northern Ireland (Local Elections) not later than one and a half hours after the start of proceedings on the first such Motion; and these Motions may be proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 12th March, any Consolidated Fund Bill ordered to be brought in and read the first time shall be proceeded with as if the Second Reading thereof stood as an Order of the Day, and Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills) shall apply.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Avon Ring Road

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

9.54 pm

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise a subject of enormous importance to tens of thousands of my constituents—the urgent need to complete stage 2 of the Avon ring road. I am grateful that the Minister is here to respond.

Proposals for the Avon ring road around the eastern fringe of Bristol between the M32 and the A4 have been implemented progressively since 1986. One last section remains to be constructed, which is known formally as stage 2. It will run between Shortwood to the north and the A420 at Warmley to the south. Locally, we refer to stage 2 of the Avon ring road as the missing link. Some three quarters of the ring road is in place, but the link between Shortwood and Warmley is missing. It is therefore clear that I am not seeking to make a case for building a new road. The decision whether to construct the Avon ring road was, rightly or wrongly, made many years ago.

The issue I wish to raise this evening is when a road that is three quarters complete will be finished. The road has a beginning and an end, but it has nothing in the middle for more than a mile and a half. The overwhelming majority of my constituents who are affected want to see the road completed as quickly as possible.

It is not difficult to see why. Because the ring road has a gap in the middle, heavy vehicles are diverted on to residential roads that are totally unsuitable for such traffic. The inevitable consequence is that the lives of thousands of local residents have been made a misery. Heavy lorries pound up and down narrow residential roads in places such as Mangotsfield and Warmley, and the results are obvious, including noise, fumes, environmental pollution and the daily risk to life and limb. On behalf of my constituents, I say, enough is enough. The situation has got to stop.

The strength of feeling on the issue is clear for all to see. There have been countless petitions to the local authority, as Avon county council and, more recently, as South Gloucestershire council. There are regular demonstrations in support of completion, and I recently delivered more than 1,000 individual letters to the Secretary of State for the Environment calling for urgent action.

Naturally, some are opposed to the completion of the ring road. Those people are in a small minority. They are certainly a minority of those who have written to me on the issue. Most of the opponents seem to live outside my constituency, a safe distance away from the residential roads where heavy lorries pound back and forth. Two of the major objectors live eight miles away, in Bath. The people who live locally face a nightmare of gigantic proportions.

Those who do not want the ring road to be completed try to invoke the arguments against road building. Those are familiar arguments that I will not comment on further, but, as I have said, this is not a matter of building a new road. The choice is not whether or not to have a new road but whether to complete a road that is already three quarters built or to leave it as it is. Do we allow the crazy

[Mr. Roger Berry]

situation to remain whereby the road comes to an abrupt end whether one is travelling southward or northward, so that traffic is inevitably diverted on to residential roads, causing enormous environmental damage?

I make no apology for claiming the environmental high ground for the case for the completion of the ring road. There are other cases of this kind, but those of us who would describe ourselves as concerned about the environment cannot possibly say that the environment is improved by having a gap in the ring road, with all the environmental damage that that causes for thousands of families with lorries going up and down residential roads, compared with the situation if the ring road were completed. It certainly is not.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Mr. Berry: Many conservationists, such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England, support the completion of the Avon ring road. No one in their right mind wants to build more roads unless the benefits clearly outweigh the costs. But, as the CPRE has said, in this particular case, the environmental benefits of completing the ring road far outweigh the costs.

The critics of completing the road have invoked a second argument, saying that the Bristol-Bath cycleway and footpath is under threat. That is simply untrue. In fact, under the agreed scheme, there will be greater provision for cyclists, and there should be no difficulty making temporary arrangements during the construction period.

In addition to the urgent need to close the so-called missing link in the ring road, to remove heavy traffic from residential roads, it is necessary for local business development and employment in the area that the road should be completed. For example, it is needed for the new development at Emerson's Green. Many businesses have located in my constituency in Kingswood and nearby on the assumption that the road would be quickly completed. It is no exaggeration to say that, if the road is not completed, many of my constituents will run the risk of losing their jobs as their firms locate elsewhere where communications are better.

I make those points not because I believe that there is any disagreement on the case that I have put forward between me and the Government—I do not believe there is—but because, inevitably, there is some debate locally, and I want to put my strongly held views firmly on the record. There is an overriding case in terms of the environment for completing the ring road and removing the misery that exists for many people in my constituency.

The situation can be briefly summarised. Just over a couple of years ago, in October and November 1994, there was a public inquiry to consider objections to the various orders and applications necessary for the project to go ahead. A year later, in October 1995, the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport confirmed those orders and applications. At the time, that seemed to many of us a rather excessive delay, but it was nothing compared with the delays that were to follow.

Next, a legal challenge was lodged in the High Court by a Mr. Nicolson and a Mr. McNeeny, both of whom live eight miles away in Bath, and who therefore do not have to suffer the misery inflicted on my constituents. They both also, as it happens, obtained the benefit of legal aid to pursue their action, a matter to which I shall refer briefly in a moment.

The precise reasons for that legal challenge need not detain me. They are well known to those with an interest in the matter, but the purpose was pretty obvious, and it has been clearly stated: it is to frustrate the wishes of local residents to have the road completed.

As a result of that legal challenge, I made representations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, asking him to do all he could to expedite the High Court hearing.

At the end of February last year, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), sent me an encouraging reply. He told me:

> "Avon County Council as the promoting authority for the scheme have applied to the Court for an expedited hearing and I can assure you that my Department are giving every possible support to that request . . . you may rest assured that we will do everything in our power to avoid unnecessary delay."

I was indeed encouraged by that.

However, I was disappointed when the High Court hearing due to commence on 18 July last year had to be aborted. Why did that happen? As I was subsequently informed by the Under-Secretary of State, it was caused by the late submission of affidavits by the Department of Transport. Two drafts were made available only on the day of the hearing, 18 July.

Inevitably and regrettably, therefore, the High Court hearing had to be postponed—a further delay. The hearing finally took place in November, following which the High Court gave the go-ahead to complete the missing link. As soon as that happened, along came the solicitors acting on behalf of Mr. Nicolson and Mr. McNeeny, who lodged notice of an appeal.

So on to the Court of Appeal we go, in this sorry saga. Again, I immediately wrote to the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment urging the Government to do all they could to expedite the appeal.

I see that the Minister for Railways and Roads is to respond to the debate tonight, so I must explain that I wrote to the Department of the Environment because that Department had just met representatives of South Gloucestershire council to discuss the local government finance settlement. In that discussion, the question of the ring road had been raised, and South Gloucestershire was awaiting a response.

Although I did not raise the matter with the Department of Transport, I understand that the letter that I sent to the Department of the Environment on 24 January has been passed to the Minister who is to reply. In fairness to him, I must acknowledge that he received the letter only on 21 February. I hope that he will respond favourably to my request.

As things stand, we see a sorry state of affairs. The appeal has been entered on the appropriate Court of Appeal list, and I am advised that a target date 12 months ahead is anticipated for the hearing. After all the delays that we have had on stage 2 of the Avon ring road, further delays are unacceptable.

I therefore ask the Government above all to respond positively to the request in my letter to the Department of the Environment dated five or six weeks ago. I hope that

they will respond, and will do all in their power to expedite the Court of Appeal hearing. We cannot wait another 12 months for a decision. South Gloucestershire council, with which I have worked closely on the matter, has already applied for expedition of the hearing date. Its grounds for doing so have my strongest possible support, and I shall place them on the record.

First and foremost, as I have repeatedly said, there is an urgent need to complete the ring road to relieve damage to the residential environment caused by heavy traffic using roads totally unsuitable for that purpose. Secondly, it is necessary to complete the ring road to facilitate wider economic benefits, such as the Emerson's Green development, which I have already mentioned, and to reduce the number of accidents.

Thirdly, there is a need for certainty to avoid further unnecessary expenditure on short-term relief measures. Inevitably, with all those delays, the local authority has had to spend substantial sums on such measures. Clearly that is nonsense, and we need to get the matter sorted out so that that is no longer necessary.

Fourthly, there is a need for certainty to allow transport supplementary grant applications to be processed for the next financial year, and to allow tendering procedures to be commenced. Certainty is also needed to remove the blight on private properties affected by compulsory purchase orders.

I have referred in passing to one aspect of the appeal that has caused enormous anger among my constituents—an anger that I share. The applicants, Mr. Nicolson and Mr. McNeeny, have been awarded legal aid. I have made representations to the Legal Aid Board expressing my profound concern about that.

South Gloucestershire council has made similar representations of a more detailed nature, asking the board to review its decision to grant legal aid in the case. In the council's view, legal aid is not justified, either on the legal merits or in respect of the proper use of public funds. I look forward to the Legal Aid Board's review. Constituents who want legal aid for divorce proceedings or to get the Coal Authority to accept responsibility for local mine shafts have enormous difficulties obtaining it. As all hon. Members know, it is incredibly difficult for constituents to get legal aid. I find it astonishing that those two gentlemen have been granted legal aid. I hope that the Legal Aid Board will review that as a matter of urgency.

After the previous debate, I am not sure whether I can deal with funding without some embarrassment, because I am calling for increased public spending. A road cannot be built without being paid for. South Gloucestershire council's transport policy and planning submission for 1997–98 included a bid for £8.3 million to fund stage 2. In December last year, the council received its TPP settlement. Supplementary credit approval for a mere £1 million was reserved, for a scheme costing £25 million. That is insufficient to begin construction this year, whatever happens in the Court of Appeal. In addition to the commitment that I hope to hear this evening from the Government to seek to speed up the Court of Appeal hearing, it is essential that they clarify their position on funding.

A £25 million scheme will have to be funded largely from Government grants. If it is based on local authority borrowing, it will cost £3 million a year simply to service the debt. The local authority has a capped budget and has just made £10 million of cuts in services, including education and social services. It cannot afford to fund the ring road.

My constituents are suffering in their tens of thousands because of delays in completing the missing link in the Avon ring road. I ask the Minister to respond positively to my request that the Government should do all that they can to expedite the Court of Appeal hearing. I also urge the Minister to give South Gloucestershire council the assurances on funding that would enable the Avon ring road to be completed as a matter of urgency.

10.11 pm

Sir John Cope (Northavon): I rise briefly to support what the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) has said. More of his constituents are affected than mine, but some of mine are affected in ways similar to those that he has outlined.

The debate is not about road building in principle. I detected some hesitancy about road building in principle in some of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I agree that we should be selective about which roads are to be built. For example, I was against the A46 improvements that were proposed not long ago, not far from the scheme that we are discussing.

Local people all support the completion of the ring road. It is important for my constituency and for the hon. Gentleman's constituency. It is also important for the whole of the south part of Bristol. As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, it is important for the completion of Emerson's Green, the new development in the north part, and to ensure that it is a success.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I find it extremely irritating, to put it mildly, that the two objectors keep getting legal aid to delay the scheme. I find that decision of the Legal Aid Board difficult to understand.

I support the hon. Gentleman's comments. I would like the road to be completed as soon as possible. I reinforce his pleas to my hon. Friend the Minister in support of that objective.

10.14 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) have both explained the history of the scheme and the frustration which they and their constituents feel at the lack of progress in implementing what is obviously a vital missing link. Coupled with that is the frustration of their constituents at seeing their money as taxpayers being recycled through legal aid and used to thwart their wishes. The hon. Member for Kingswood will understand that I cannot comment on legal aid policy.

The hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend have said that the opponents of the scheme live a comfortable distance away from the problem. In this age of acronyms, I have one of my own for such people. They are not NIMBYs—not in my back yard—but what I describe as NIYBYs—not in your back yard. They tell those who suffer from traffic congestion that they should be denied a solution to their problems.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the lack of progress is not in the hands of the local authority or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. It is

[Mr. John Watts]

the further legal action by Mr. Nicolson and Mr. McNeeny which is causing the delay. However, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has also applied to the court for an expedited hearing. We believe that it is important that the issue should be resolved quickly.

On funding, I can reassure the hon. Gentleman in the light of today's earlier debate, that, although he might have thought he was, he is not in fact asking for an increase in the total of public expenditure. The funding for the road would come out of the existing baseline of my Department. When it is able to be funded and can go ahead, it will not be adding to the control total. He will not be adding to the criticisms that my right hon. and hon. Friends were heaping upon other members of his party earlier.

On the funding of the scheme, we are satisfied that it continues to meet the Department's criteria for transport supplementary grant under the TPP system, and, subject to the outcome of the current legal processes, the normal rules will apply. That means that, unless there is any significant change in the nature of the scheme, and as long as work progresses satisfactorily and the costs remain reasonable after it has passed its final legal hurdles, we will fund it through to completion in the normal way.

The amount allocated to the project for 1997–98 is, as the hon. Gentleman said, only £1 million. That is a recognition that the delay caused by the further legal challenge is likely to prevent a much greater rate of spend in that financial year. It is not an indication that we have lost the will to support the project, but it shows simply that the phasing of expenditure will be less in 1997–98 and more in the subsequent years.

I hope that my response has given the hon. Member for Kingswood the assurance he needs, personally and for his constituents. I join him in hoping that the legal issues are resolved rapidly. At that time, the authority will be in a position to go out to tender and start the construction. The hon. Gentleman has my assurance that funding will continue through to completion on the basis that I have set out.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes past Ten o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 24 February 1997

PRIME MINISTER

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Prime Minister what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* the Prime Minister, *(b)* the Deputy Prime Minister and *(c)* officials from the Cabinet Office at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which *(a)* to *(c)* have attended indicating the cost of their attendance and the names of those who attended. [16560]

The Prime Minister: I attended the Scottish Grand Committee meeting on 5 July 1996 in Dumfries and had officials in attendance as necessary. Ministers attend Scottish Grand Committee meetings as part of their normal parliamentary duties and officials do so as part of their normal departmental duties. Expenditure falling to my Department has been limited to travelling costs.

No other Ministers from the Cabinet Office have had the opportunity to attend a Scottish Grand Committee meeting.

Business Appointment Rules

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister when applications were received from the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) and Dame Pauline Neville-Jones under the business appointment rules; and when, and on what terms, approvals for their appointment to the Natwest bank were granted. [16948]

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) was not bound to seek the advice of my advisory committee on business appointments before joining the National Westminster bank in October 1995 because the guidelines on the acceptance of appointments outside Government for former Ministers did not come into effect until the start of the 1995–96 Session of Parliament.

Nevertheless, I understand that Mr. Hurd consulted the chairman of the advisory committee informally before taking up the appointment. Dame Pauline Neville-Jones applied for prior permission, in accordance with the rules on the acceptance of outside appointments by Crown servants, to accept a position with the National Westminster bank after retirement. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, on the advice of the advisory committee on business appointments, approved Dame Pauline's application unconditionally on 24 June 1996.

Intelligence and Security Committee

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Prime Minister if he has received the 1996 annual report of the intelligence and security committee in accordance with the Intelligence Services Act 1994. [17513]

The Prime Minister: I have received the 1996 annual report of the intelligence and security committee and am presenting it to Parliament today. Copies are also being placed in the Libraries of both Houses. I am grateful to the committee for the valuable work it has undertaken in the preparation of the report. Certain portions of the report contained material which fell within the provisions of section 10 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994; accordingly, after consultation with the committee, these have been deleted from the published version.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Tamils

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many Sri Lankan Tamils are in the United Kingdom having been granted political asylum; [16934]

(2) how many Sri Lankan Tamils are currently seeking political asylum in the United Kingdom. [16904]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information is for all Sri Lankan nationals; no distinction is made in statistical records between Tamils and other Sri Lankans.

During 1996, five nationals of Sri Lanka were granted asylum in the United Kingdom and a further 25 were refused asylum but granted exceptional leave to remain. Information on the number granted asylum in earlier years is given in table 3.1 of the Home Office statistical bulletin, "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom, 1995" issue 9/96, a copy of which is in the Library. Information regarding those granted exceptional leave in earlier years is given in table 3.2 of the same publication. It is not known how many of those granted either asylum or exceptional leave have remained in the United Kingdom.

As at 31 December 1996, an estimated 2,895 Sri Lankan asylum seekers were awaiting an initial decision on their asylum applications.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Sri Lankan Tamils, who are being held in *(a)* prison and *(b)* detention centres, are seeking political asylum; and if he will make a statement. [16933]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information on all Sri Lankan asylum seekers held in detention, under sole Immigration Acts powers, is given in the table. No distinction is made in statistical records between Tamils and other Sri Lankans.

Sri Lankan nationals recorded as being detained[1], who had sought asylum at some stage, by location of detention as at 31 January–3 February 1997[2]

Category of person	Persons detained at Her Majesty's prison	Persons detained at Detention centre	Total
Port cases	3	3	6
Persons subject to enforcement action[3]	7	3	10
Total	10	6	16

[1] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedule 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act, 1971.
[2] Enforcement cases are as at 31 January and port cases are as at 3 February.
[3] Illegal entrants and persons subject to deportation action.

Electoral Fraud

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the penalties for electoral fraud where the offence involves the deprivation of a vulnerable elector of his or her vote. [17136]

Mr. Sackville: None. Legislation already provides for a range of penalties, up to a maximum of an unlimited fine or a term of imprisonment of up to two years, or both.

CS Gas

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on what date the Alsetex CS gas dispenser was approved by the police scientific and development branch at St. Albans for use by Home Office constabularies; and which alternative products were *(a)* tested and *(b)* approved; [16679]

(2) what chemical is used as the solvent in the Alsetex CS gas dispenser approved by the police scientific and development branch. [16680]

Mr. Maclean: Decisions about the selection of police protective equipment are a matter for chief police officers. The Association of Police Chief Officers announced its choice of equipment marketed by SAE Alsetex for operational trials of CS sprays on 19 October 1995. It chose this equipment following advice from the police scientific and development branch about a variety of CS spray devices. The solvent used in the Alsetex equipment is methyl isobutyl ketone.

Firearms Administration Office

Sir Jerry Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the firearms administration office at New Scotland Yard is to close in 1997; and what steps are being taken to provide alternative arrangements to serve the public. [17450]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that firearms licensing functions currently discharged by the firearms licensing branch at New Scotland Yard will be devolved to each of the five areas of the Metropolitan police district on 1 April 1997. A small team will remain at New Scotland Yard with a policy development remit for firearms licensing.

Blood Samples (Drug Testing)

Sir Jerry Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will instruct police forces that when a blood sample is taken after an accident and tested for alcohol that it should also be treated for drugs; and if he will make a statement. [17451]

Mr. Maclean: No. The decision on what action to take in each case is a matter for the police officer concerned. In the case of an alleged offence under section 3A or 4 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, a blood sample can be taken with the consent of a medical practitioner and be tested for drugs and alcohol.

Dai Ichi Kyoto Insurance Company

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date approaches were made to him by Belgian police authorities seeking assistance in their investigations of the Dai Ichi Kyoto insurance company; and what actions and on what dates were taken as a result. [17400]

Mr. Kirkhope: It is not the Government's policy to comment on whether requests have been received from overseas authorities for assistance in criminal matters or on the execution of requests.

Firearms Thefts (Luton)

Sir Jerry Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reports he has received from the chief constable of Bedfordshire regarding the theft of large-calibre pistols from a police station in Luton, Bedfordshire; how many pistols were stolen; and on what date the theft occurred. [17448]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the chief constable of Bedfordshire that 23 guns which were the property of a former firearms dealer were taken from a store at Luton police station.

None of the guns were pistols, and none were police issue guns. Police have traced all but one of the guns. Their investigations continue and I cannot comment further at this stage.

New Constituences

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will rank the new parliamentary constituencies by share of the electorate below normal retirement age. [15836]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

This information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 24 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on ranking the new parliamentary constituencies by share of the electorate below normal retirement age.

Electoral Registration Officers are responsible for collecting information for electoral registers. However, apart from the number of attainers, no information on the electorate is collected by age. Therefore the requested information can not be provided.

I regret that I cannot be more helpful.

ENVIRONMENT

Health and Safety Executive Studies

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new instructions he has given to the Health and Safety Executive concerning the carrying out of studies of over 25 people relating to stress, working hours, fatigue or safety; and which proposed studies by the HSE have been abandoned as a result. [16216]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has given no new instructions to the Health and Safety Executive concerning studies in these areas.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Health and Safety Executive is required to obtain ministerial permission before conducting surveys of more then 25 people; and what recent changes there have been in this respect. [16212]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Health and Safety Executive is required to obtain ministerial permission before conducting surveys of 25 or more people in accordance with the Prime Minister's instructions on the control of statistical surveys, which were issued to all Government Departments in August 1994. This is because the Government need to strike the balance between burdens on businesses and the need to collect information for Government purposes. No recent changes have been made in this respect.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new instructions he has given concerning departmental approval of studies of over 25 people relating to stress, working hours, fatigue or safety. [16215]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has given no new instructions concerning departmental approval of studies in these areas.

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16179]

Sir Paul Beresford: In the last three years, my Department has used Addecco Alfred Marks, Manpower and Brook Street employment agencies to recruit temporary typists and secretaries. Since line managers have the delegation to appoint such staff, information on numbers, costs and length of employment is not held centrally and is not readily available.

The chief executives of the Department's agencies have been asked to write to the hon. Member about their own arrangements.

Letter from M. C. Buck to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 18 February 1997:

I would refer to the above Parliamentary Question concerning the use of employment agencies.

Please be advised of the following:-

(1) The names of the agencies

Alfred Marks (a division of Adia UK Ltd)

David Chorley Associates

Dunlop & Baddenoch Ltd

Reed Personnel Ltd.

Tobias Recruitment Ltd

The People Business Ltd

(2) The number employed by the agencies in work for the Department

Currently 1

(3) The total cost of using employment agencies

Year to 31 March 1994 £51,354
Year to 31 March 1995 £78,158
Year to 31 March 1996 £73,057
} For temporary staff

10 months to 31 January 1997 £37,534 - also includes One permanent

(4) The median cost paid to the agency per person recruited

Year to 31 March 1994 nil

Year to 31 March 1995 nil

Year to 31 March 1996 nil

10 months to 31 January 97 £2,484 (Cashier)

(5) The average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies.

1 Permanent

Temporary assignments average two to six months.

Letter form R. G. Courtney to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 18 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for the Environment has asked me to reply on behalf of the Building Research Establishment Executive Agency to your question on the use of private employment agencies.

The Building Research Establishment has not used any private employment agencies for the recruitment of staff within the last three years.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 18 February 1997:

I have been asked by Sir Paul Beresford to reply to your question about the use made by the Planning Inspectorate of private employment agencies.

We have not used private employment agencies to recruit staff on our behalf. We have, however, used agencies such as RAS and PA Consulting to advise us on recruitment methods.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which are the 10 highest spending local councils per head in England. [16157]

Sir Paul Beresford: The 10 local authorities within each class of authority with the highest budgeted net revenue expenditure per head are as follows:

	1996–97 Budgeted net revenue expenditure per head[1] £
London Boroughs[2]	
1 Tower Hamlets	1,449
2 Hackney	1,413
3 Islington	1,324
4 Camden	1,271
5 Southwark	1,258
6 Newham	1,228
7 Hammersmith and Fulham	1,190
8 Greenwich	1,153
9 Haringey	1,139
10 Westminster	1,127
Metropolitan Districts and Unitary Authorities[3]	
1 Liverpool	1,053
2 Manchester	1,053
3 Knowsley	1,018
4 Birmingham	972
5 Wolverhampton	940
6 Middlesborough UA	915
7 Hartlepool UA	913
8 Sandwell	910
9 Gateshead	901
10 Salford	886
Shire Counties	
1 Northumberland	680
2 Lancashire	659
3 Durham	659
4 Cumbria	656
5 Kent	656
6 Bedfordshire	654
7 Hertfordshire	651
8 Northamptonshire	640
9 Nottinghamshire	638
10 Cheshire	636
Shire Districts	
1 Leicester	203
2 Luton	198
3 Alnwick	193
4 Southampton	180
5 Harlow	176
6 Reading	175
7 Hove	175
8 Blackburn	169
9 Wear Valley	160
10 Portsmouth	160

Notes:

[1] The information has been grouped by the classes of authority which bear responsibility for the same range of functions. Comparisons should therefore not be made between these groups.

[2] City of London excluded.

[3] Isles of Scilly excluded.

British Waterways

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been Her Majesty's Government's grant in aid to British Waterways in the last 10 years. [16956]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Grant-in-aid to British Waterways since 1987–88 has been as follows:

1987–88: £43.0 million
1988–89: £44.8 million
1989–90: £47.156 million
1990–91: £48.3 million
1991–92: £50.1 million
1992–93: £51.075 million
1993–94: £49.3 million
1994–95: £48.866 million
1995–96: £49.84 million
1996–97: £49.8 million
1997–98: £50.89 million.

The figure for 1996–97 is currently under review.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *261*, how many members of the Future BRE group were also members of the in-house bid team. [17444]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Five.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *261*, how many members of the Foundation for the Built Environment have been appointed to date. [17441]

Mr. Jones: The Foundation for the Built Environment is a company limited by guarantee the members of which, for the time being, are two members of staff of Ashurst Morris Crisp, legal advisers to the management bid team.

Stress-related Illness

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's estimate of the number of working days lost as a result of stress-related illness in each of the past 10 years. [17457]

Sir Paul Beresford: There are no data that provide reliable estimates for work days lost annually from stress-related illness for each of the past 10 years.

Capital Finance

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to consolidate the local authority capital finance regulations and to provide guidance on the capital finance system. [17514]

Mr. Curry: The capital finance regulations, first made in 1990, have become increasingly unwieldy because of successive amendments. I want councils to have the clearest possible guidance and not be tied up with unnecessary red tape, so I am publishing today an updated and simplified version of the regulations consolidating all the changes made in the last six years.

The document being published is an entirely new text with all the changes set out clearly and simply. It will make it easier for local authorities to make the best use of all the opportunities that we have created for investment, through public-private partnership, in new schools, roads and other amenities for their residents.

The new regulations also bring into effect changes to the rules on capital receipts to help promote regeneration schemes in areas of need. Following extensive consultation the scheme has been extended to a further 21 wards, bringing the total number of authorities that can benefit to 236.

The regulations also extend for a further year the concessionary set-aside rate applying to the disposal of bus and airport companies and bring into effect a concession to help local authorities lease, for up to 10 years, private-sector dwellings for the homeless. The regulations incorporate important changes to the private finance initiative regulations made last October, strengthening authorities' powers to enter into partnership deals with the private sector. They make some technical changes concerning specified capital grants, the use of credit approvals by debt-free authorities, grants given by and repayable to English Partnerships, and capital finance arrangements for national parks authorities.

I am also publishing "A Guide to the Local Government Capital Finance System." This is an informal, user-friendly explanation of the key features of the system which authorities will be able to turn to for day to day guidance.

Planning Policy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to publish the revised planning policy guidance note 1; and if he will make a statement about the further action he proposes to take to encourage mixed use development in towns and cities. [17591]

Mr. Gummer: I am delighted to publish today the revised "Planning Policy Guidance Note 1"—PPG1—"General Policy and Principles".

This completes a long process of planning policy reform to strike the right balance between helping sustain economic growth while ensuring the protection of our environment.

The revised PPG1:

- reaffirms the role of the planning system in meeting the needs of a growing and competitive economy, in providing for new development, such as housing, and in protecting the natural and built environment;
- restates the limited circumstances in which it is appropriate to use planning obligations to secure development;
- reaffirms the Government's commitment to a plan-led system of land-use planning; and
- emphasises the need to provide services in accordance with the principles of the citizens charter and, in a new section on propriety, advises that elected members should make planning decisions on the basis of an officer's written report.

The new PPG1 also provides guidance on sustainable development, design and mixed use, three themes which the underpin the Government's approach to the planning system.

To emphasise the importance of sustainable development and the central role of land use planning in helping to deliver it, we have placed four significant paragraphs at the beginning of PPG1. At the heart of sustainable development is the aim of reconciling economic development with protection and enhancement of the environment. Measures to improve energy efficiency, minimise waste, make better use of land and improve transport efficiency may achieve sustainable development by promoting environmentally-friendly economic activity. In other instances, there may be conflict, and the planning system may need to ensure that the achievement of social and economic objectives is not at the expense of important natural resources, and properly respects the cultural heritage.

We are also producing a good practice guide for local planning authorities to help them take account of sustainable development in exercising their functions, particularly through their development plans. This should be published during the first half of 1997.

Revised PPG1 places renewed emphasis on the importance of good design, particularly urban design. It reflects our aim of ensuring that to build means to enhance, a theme central to our quality in town and country initiative. It recognises that good design has tremendous benefits: it can help promote sustainable development, improve the quality of the existing environment, attract business and investment and reinforce civic pride and a sense of place.

The revised design guidance advises that:

- local planning authorities should set out in their development plans design policies against which development proposals are to be assessed;
- applicants for planning permission will be expected to be able to show how their development proposals have taken account of the need for good design;
- it is proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness but local planning authorities should not attempt to impose a particular architectural style or taste arbitrarily;
- plan policies and supplementary design guidance should focus on encouraging good design and should avoid stifling responsible innovation;
- generally, planning permission should not be refused on design grounds where the design of proposed development is consistent with relevant design policies or guidance; and
- local planning authorities should focus on broader issues of urban design, and not concern themselves with detailed design matters unless those matters have a significant effect on the character or quality of an area.

We have commissioned the production of a good practice guide on how the planning system might best promote good design, particularly urban design. It is intended that this, together with PPG1 itself, will provide the framework for planning how design issues should be handled within the planning process.

I am also pleased to announce that my Department will be sponsoring a national urban design award, as part of the Civic Trust's annual design awards. I believe this will give much deserved recognition to development proposals which take proper account of their context and which demonstrate principles of good urban design. I want the award to help promote innovative design solutions for specific areas—solutions which reflect a real understanding of how to design places for people.

Mixed-use development is one of the main objectives underlying the Government's approach to the planning system, particularly in town centres. Developments which

produce a variety of compatible uses on a site or in an area are more sustainable because of the benefits mixed use brings:

- it increases vitality and adds to the variety of building design and form;
- it strengthens the economic base—a good balance of activities supports property values and attracts investors;
- it improves occupation levels and standards of building maintenance;
- it improves security where residents and businesses are in close proximity;
- it reduces travel requirements;
- and it can relieve development pressures on fringe and out-of-town locations, especially for housing, by enhancing opportunities for vacant urban sites.

We want to encourage local authorities and developers to think more imaginatively about ways of incorporating mixed uses into their proposals and produce lively and successful developments. The planning system has an important role to play and the revised PPG1 advises that:

- local planning authorities should include mixed-use policies and proposals for major schemes in their development plans in consultation with developers and communities;
- local authorities should take a positive and flexible approach to changes of use, the reuse of vacant sites and the application of parking and others standards;
- local planning authorities should be realistic in their approaches to achieving mixed use schemes and about what is likely to be deliverable, and reflect this in the level of prescription they give in plans; and
- there is a role for compact "urban village" type developments in creating the environment people will choose to live in.

In conjunction with PPG1, I am taking forward a substantial package of other initiatives to inform and encourage more mixed-use development.

I recently set up a departmental review to consider the constraints on mixed-use development and options for tackling them. The review's findings were informed by internal discussions, meetings with investors, developers, funders, surveying consultants and planners, and a literature review. It also drew on advice from my property advisory group and on the discussions which took place at the symposium on mixed-use development which the Department co-sponsored with Birmingham city council and others last summer. The review identified a broad range of measures to stimulate mixed-use development, some of which we have already implemented.

We have extended VAT zero-rating to the sale or long lease of new dwellings created by conversion of non-residential buildings. This has made residential schemes more viable in a number of areas formerly dominated by warehousing and offices. We have also extended the permitted development order, to enable space over shops and other high street buildings to be used as a single flat. During the review, we issued guidance to local housing authorities on the benefits of mixed use development, and on integrating other uses into housing redevelopments on cleared sites—circular 17/96—Private Sector Renewal: a Strategic Approach. Earlier this month, our support for English Partnerships' involvement in mixed use developments enabled them to launch the "Making Mixed Use Happen" initiative with the urban villages forum. Under this, English Partnerships will make at least £50 million available for qualifying projects over the next four years.

We are ensuring a mixed-use perspective in several departmental research projects. These include the pilot one-stop shop development approvals study and the production of good practice guidance on how the planning system might best be used to promote high quality design, particularly urban design, which will complement English Partnerships' "Time for Design" guide. Our research on flats over shops is due for publication next month. It will include recommendations to promote such schemes within wider regeneration strategies with mixed use objectives. Following our research into the impact of the buildings regulations on mixed-use development, we will tackle the mainly minor difficulties of interpretation that were identified when the approved documents are next updated. Other departmental research in 1997–98 will address various issues which can affect the opportunities for mixed use development in town centres and feed into good practice guidance.

We will be talking to several of the Department's sponsored bodies and to local authorities to see what more can be done to encourage and promote mixed-use schemes by supporting pilot projects, providing sites, using procurement policies and issuing good practice guidance. We will also be carrying out a comprehensive evaluation of local planning authorities' policies on mixed-use development in 1998–99 and will consult local authorities about how best to maintain the momentum of the flats over shops initiatives which we have been supporting in recent years. Additionally, we will be exploring with other Government Departments what action they may be able to take to adjust their own policies and programmes where this will stimulate mixed-use development.

All in all this is a substantial package of measures which will improve the quality of life and environment in our towns and cities in the years ahead.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Pilot Waste Audit

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the progress of his Department's pilot waste audit. [16426]

Mr. Streeter: The only waste pilot scheme currently in progress within my Department is being conducted by the Court Service. I have asked Michael Huebner, the chief Executive of the Court Service, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Martyn Jones, dated 24 February 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the progress of the Court Service's pilot waste audit.

The Court Service commenced a waste audit at a major Crown Court centre at the end of last year. Preliminary investigations have been undertaken into waste streams and amounts of paper (and other items) currently recycled and reused. Further investigations into how best to minimise waste at source, and therefore the impact of waste disposal on the environment, are continuing.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment

his Department had made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone depleting substances within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16308]

Mr. Streeter: My Department, its agencies, and the Northern Ireland Court Service ensure that annual assessments of the presence of hazardous materials are carried out on their behalf in accordance with the requirements of health and safety legislation. When such materials are found, they are removed or made safe as quickly as is practicable. With regard to ozone depleting substances, each body has completed a programme of inspections of all buildings on their estate.

Within the Court Service there are no halon fire fighting systems, all refrigerants used have an ozone depletion potential of less than 0.05 and all new builds use cavity fill insulation in accordance with BS5617, 5618 and 8208 or use alternative materials. The Lord Chancellor's Department has no halon fire fighting systems, and controls, monitors and removes ozone depleting substances in accordance with the EC protocol. The Northern Ireland Court Service has phased out all halon fire fighting systems and uses the Department of the Environment (NI) Construction Service to ensure that ozone depleting substances in refrigerants and air conditioning are controlled and monitored to comply with regulations.

The HM Land Registry controls, monitors and replaces all ozone depleting substances as soon as is practicable. The Public Record Office is phasing out all halon fire fighting equipment by March 1997. The Public Trust Office's audit concluded that it complied with all regulations regarding ozone depleting substances.

Legal Aid

Mr. Soley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if legal aid is available for malicious defamation proceedings in the case of a person accused of murder. [16995]

Mr. Streeter: Full civil legal aid is not available for defamation actions, although legal advice about defamation is available under the green form advice and assistance scheme.

Legal aid is available for malicious falsehood actions.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of *(a)* energy use and *(b)* waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16415]

Mr. Newton: The small size of the Privy Council Office, and the fact that it is located within buildings managed by the Cabinet Office, limit the scope for independent initiatives on energy use or waste management. However, my Department seeks to exercise maximum economy in energy use, and to minimise waste, including through the recycling of paper and other materials.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Lord President of the Council what assessment his Department has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings which his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16280]

Mr. Newton: The Privy Council Office is committed both to complying with the requirements of all health and safety legislation relating to the identification and control of hazardous materials in the workplace, and to minimising the use of ozone-depleting substances.

TREASURY

Unemployment

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals have not worked since leaving school. [15978]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Frank Field, dated 24 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many people have not worked since leaving school.

According to the summer 1996 Labour Force Survey (LFS) an estimated 1,675,000 people in Great Britain had never had a paid job since leaving school. The breakdown of this estimate by educational and economic status is shown in the attached table. Please note that this breakdown is probably very seasonal.

People who have not had a paid job since leaving school (GB, Summer 1996, Thousands)

Not seasonally adjusted	*All (of which:)*	*Full-time student (not at school)*	*Not full-time student*
All (of which:)	1,675	438	1,237
ILO unemployed	346	68	279
Economically inactive	1,329	371	958

Source: ONS, Labour Force.

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the parliamentary constituencies in which the number of people out of work and claiming benefit declined by more than 40 per cent. between December 1991 and December 1996, including in the table for each constituency the total for *(a)* December 1991 and *(b)* December 1996, and the percentage reduction. [15731]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. William Powell, dated 24 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on claimant unemployment by parliamentary constituency.

Information on the numbers of people claimant unemployed by parliamentary constituency and the percentage reduction are available and can be obtained on-line from the Nomis database accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Unemployment and Inflation

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage change in *(a)* unemployment and *(b)* inflation in each of the past 25 years. [16107]

Mrs. Angela Knight: This information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 25 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the percentage change in unemployment and inflation in each of the past 25 years.

The unemployment data requested is available from the Nomis database which is accessible in the House of Commons Library.

The inflation data requested is published in the *Retail Prices Index Business Monitor (MM23).* A copy of this publication is available in the House of Commons Library.

Electoral Register

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the total number of electors for each of the new parliamentary constituencies in England for the 1997–98 register of electors effective from 16 February. [16208]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. David Marshall, dated 24 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to your recent question asking whether he will list the total number of electors on the 1997–98 Electoral Register, for the new Parliamentary Constituencies in England.

ONS are preparing a Monitor detailing electors on the 1997–98 Electoral Register by the new Parliamentary Constituencies. This will be published as soon as possible, and certainly by early April 1997. It will be placed in the Library on publication day. The total number of electors on the 1996 Electoral Register for each of the new Parliamentary Constituencies in the UK was published in ONS Monitor EL96/2 on 23 July 1996.

I hope this reply has been helpful.

Pensions Mis-selling

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will instruct the Securities and Investments Board to oblige insurance companies to discontinue legal action against the alleged victims of pensions mis-selling, pending *(a)* decisions on what compensation is owed to those victims and *(b)* the conclusion of the legal remedies being pursued by those victims. [16448]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I am not aware of any legal actions by insurance companies against alleged victims of pension mis-selling. The only actions I am aware of are by investors against insurance companies.

Personal Investment Authority

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors his Department considered in respect of the appointment in 1993 of the present chairman of the Personal Investment Authority; and if he will make a statement. [16445]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Neither the Treasury nor the Securities and Investments Board has any role in the appointment of the chairman of the Personal Investment Authority. As it is a company limited by guarantee, this appointment is a matter for its board.

Female Employment

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list, in descending order, the percentage of women in work in relation to the total work force in each of the EU countries. [16527]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Sir Ralph Howell, dated 24 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the percentage of women in work as a proportion of the total workforce in each of the EU countries.

Information for the European Union countries showing the numbers of women in the labour force (equivalent to the workforce) and in employment is published in Table 14 and 18 of the Eurostat publication *Labour Force Survey Results 1995.* A copy of the publication is available in the House of Commons Library.

Perinatal Mortality

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the most recent available figures for perinatal mortality in *(a)* Bolton, *(b)* England and *(c)* the United Kingdom; and what trends there have been in each of those areas during the past five years. [16559]

Mrs. Angela Knight: This information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Thurnham, dated 24 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to your recent question asking for the Perinatal Mortality Rate for the United Kingdom, England and Bolton for the last five years.

The figures requested are shown in the table. On 1 October 1992 the legal definition of a stillbirth was altered from a baby born dead after 28 or more completed weeks gestation to one born dead after 24 or more completed weeks gestation. This had the effect of raising the perinatal mortality from 1993 onwards.

Perinatal mortality rates[1] for the United Kingdom, England and Bolton, 1991–1995

Year	United Kingdom	England	Bolton
1991	8.1	8.0	11.7
1992	7.7	7.6	14.9
1993	9.0	8.9	8.4
1994	8.9	8.8	12.9
1995	8.9	8.8	11.5

[1] Stillbirths and deaths within the first week of life per 1,000 live and stillbirths.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Claimant Count

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who took the decision to change the geographical basis of the monthly claimant count conducted by the Office for National Statistics; for what reasons the change took place with effect from April 1996; and if he will carry out back runs based on the 1981 census for each parliamentary constituency. [16777]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 24 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to your recent question on the decision to change the geographical basis of the monthly claimant count.

The decision to move to a 1991 boundary basis for the production of small area claimant count unemployment data was made by the ONS in line with its policy of providing the most up-to-date and relevant information available.

A full description of the reasons for the change and the effect of the move can be found in Labour Market Trends for July 1996, pages 311–328.

The ONS is currently assessing the feasibility of providing data from the claimant count for current Parliamentary Constituencies based on boundaries existing at the 1981 Census of Population.

Low Pay

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amount of income tax and national insurance contribution would be paid by a person *(a)* working full time and earning £8,320 per annum and *(b)* working 10 hours a week and earning £2,080 per annum. [16766]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* A single person, aged under 65, earning £8,320 per annum, would pay income tax of £860.25 and class 1 national insurance contributions at the contracted in rate of £574.08 in 1997–98. A single person working 10 hours a week and earning £2,080 per annum would pay nothing.

Economic Activity

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what projections his Department has made for the economic activity rates for men of working age for each year from 1995 to 2006. [16778]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 24 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question about projected activity rates for men of working age.

Estimated activity rates for 1995 and 1996 and projected rates for each year from 1997 to 2006, relating to all men of working age in Great Britain and using ILO definitions, are published in the February 1997 issue of Labour Market Trends, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Sumitomo Speculation Case

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes in the regulatory structure his Department proposes to make as a result of the Sumitomo metal speculation case. [16916]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* The Securities and Investments Board is responsible for the oversight of the London metal exchange as a recognised investment exchange under the Financial Services Act 1986. The SIB published the report of its review of the London metal exchange on 19 December 1996 and I am placing a copy of that report in the Library of the House of Commons.

Pound (Purchasing Power)

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the change in the purchasing power of the pound between *(a)* 1967 and 1996, *(b)* 1970 and 1975, *(c)* 1975 and 1980, *(d)* 1980 and 1990 and *(e)* 1990 and 1996; and if he will make a statement. [15373]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 11 February 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Sir Anthony Grant, dated 24 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the change in the purchasing power of the pound.

The figures requested are shown in the table, and have been calculated from the Retail Prices Index (PRI). Each figure represents the value that a fixed sum of money has in the last year of the given period, expressed as a percentage of its value in the first year of the period. For example, the amount of goods and services which could be purchased (in the UK) with £1 in 1996 is ten per cent of the amount that £1 could have purchased 29 years earlier in 1967. Similarly, the amount of goods and services which could have been purchased with £1 in 1975 is 54% of the amount that could have been purchased five years earlier in 1970.

It should be borne in mind when making comparisons that the periods covered span different numbers of years.

Period	
1967–96	10
1970–75	54
1975–80	51
1980–90	53
1990–96	83

For more information on the method of calculation, you may wish to consult the RPI Business Monitor (MM23), a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Cyclical Social Security (Scotland)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlie the projected rise in the cost of cyclical social security between 1996–97 and 2001–02 as set out in table 4.6 of general government expenditure of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98"; and if he will make a statement. [15686]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* Table 4.6 of the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report" shows projections for cyclical social security which are consistent with the Government's expectations for the public finances in the medium term. As such, it goes beyond the period covered by the last public expenditure survey for which a detailed analysis of expenditure was carried out.

Table 5.3 shows that, between 1996–97 and 1999–2000, cyclical social security is expected to rise by roughly £400 million due to four factors. Uprating benefits for the effects of inflation adds £1 billion. Higher case loads and higher average amounts of benefit paid to those under 60 years old claiming income support, particularly the sick and disabled, adds a further £1.2 billion. Although these claimants are not required to seek work, they fall within the definition of cyclical social security. Policy changes announced in the Budget and reducing unemployment over the period will save £1.9 billion in total, largely offsetting the increases.

Projections for 2000–01 and 2001–02, shown in table 4.6, were not part of the public expenditure survey and were based on simple broad assumptions. Whilst they illustrate the Government's expectations in the medium term, they lack the precision of projections for earlier years. To reflect this, the projections in table 4.6 are rounded to the nearest £1 billion.

Statistical Services

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if executive agencies, non-departmental public bodies and the Government's statistical services have shared a common approach to rounding. [15837]

Mrs. Angela Knight: It can not be said that there has been any explicit sharing of a common approach to rounding. There is a description of good practice on page 37 of the second edition of "Plain Figures", recently published by The Stationery Office, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library. In many respects, the approach taken depends inevitably on the context.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what assessment the Commission has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings for which it is responsible; and if he will make a statement. [16281]

Mr. Beith: The buildings on the parliamentary estate have been assessed under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health—COSHH—Regulations 1994. Hazardous substances are recorded and risk assessments are acted upon to minimise hazards. Environmentally friendly products are used whenever possible. A register is kept of the locations on the parliamentary estate where asbestos is known to remain. Ultimately the aim is to remove any materials containing asbestos but this cannot be done all at once, nor is it necessary to do so. Remaining asbestos is sealed and inspected at regular intervals. All equipment containing ozone depleting substances is registered and is inspected quarterly. As this equipment becomes obsolete it is replaced with environmentally friendly alternatives.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies addressed oral or supplementary questions to Ministers who primarily have responsibility for England in the Session 1995–96. [17274]

Mr. Newton: The information, taken from the parliamentary on-line information system database, is set out in the table. The list excludes questions to the Prime Minister, the Northern Ireland, Welsh and Scottish Offices, the National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Commission, the House of Commons Commission, the Church Commissioners and to me in my capacity as Leader of the House of Commons.

Frequency Member:

28 Dalyell/Tam
18 Foulkes/George
17 Walker/Bill
16 Gallie/Phil
14 Campbell/Menzies
14 Cook/Robin
13 Strang/Gavin
12 Canavan/Dennis
11 Godman/Norman A.
10 Griffiths/Nigel
8 Chisholm/Malcolm
7 Darling/Alistair
7 Kennedy/Charles
7 Salmond/Alex
6 Bruce/Malcolm
6 Clarke/Tom
6 Ewing/Margaret
6 McAvoy/Thomas
6 McLeish/Henry
5 Ingram/Adam

5 Reid/John
5 Ross/Ernie
4 Brown/Gordon
4 Clarke/Eric
4 Davidson/Ian
4 Fyfe/Maria
4 Maclennan/Robert
3 Bray/Jeremy
3 Home Robertson/John
3 Kirkwood/Archy
3 Marshall/David
3 Maxton/John
3 McFall/John
3 Squire/Rachel
3 Steel/David
3 Watson/Mike
3 Wilson/Brian
2 Connarty/Michael
2 Galloway/George
2 Hughes/Robert
2 Macdonald/Calum
2 Monro/Hector
2 Welsh/Andrew
1 Cunningham/Roseanna
1 Galbraith/Sam
1 Graham/Thomas
1 Hood/Jimmy
1 McKelvey/William
1 Moonie/Lewis
1 Stewart/Allan
1 Wallace/James
1 Worthington/Tony.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Cox: To ask the Attorney-General what is the number and percentage of cases completed by the Crown Prosecution Service at magistrates courts that have been *(a)* discontinued, *(b)* written off, *(c)* discharged at committal proceedings, *(d)* committed for trial, *(e)* bound over and *(f)* heard in court; and what was the total proceeded against in each of the 13 CPS areas in England and Wales in each year since 1992. [16238]

The Attorney-General: Tables setting out the information sought by the hon. Member would be too extensive to be included in the *Official Report* and I have placed them in the Libraries of the House. The figures contained in them are exclusive of pre-charge advice work and non-criminal proceedings, and do not include the specialised casework undertaken at CPS headquarters by Central Casework.

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16422]

The Solicitor-General: The Law Officers' Departments and agencies keep waste management issues under constant review for the buildings they occupy, and have already taken steps to recycle waste, achieve greater energy efficiency and promote the use of environmentally friendly products. Specific waste management measures include the use of "green" bins for the majority of waste paper; the recycling of used toner cartridges and fluorescent tubes; and the dissemination of the Department of the Environment's waste guide to premises managers for implementation. Policies are in place to undertake assessments of environmental performance, including waste management, on all new property acquisitions using BREEAM—the Building Research Establishment environmental assessment method—where it is appropriate to do so. Consideration is also being given to ways of applying the BREEAM approach to buildings currently occupied.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Attorney-General what assessment his Department has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings which his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16278]

The Solicitor-General: Assessments are made of hazardous and ozone-depleting substances pursuant to the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994 and other statutory requirements. Measures taken include the holding of information on materials used by cleaning and building contractors, and the maintenance of asbestos records.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Sixth Forms

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the schools in each metropolitan city which have sixth forms. [16019]

Mr. Paice: The latest available list of maintained secondary schools in metropolitan cities which have sixth forms is shown in the following table.

Maintained secondary schools in metropolitan cities' with sixth forms
Position as at January 1996

LEA Number	*School name*
Birmingham	
330	Hillcrest School and Sixth Form Centre
330	Lordswood Boys' School
330	Lordswood Girls' School
330	Sheldon Heath Community School
330	Washwood Heath School
330	Sir Wilfrid Martineau School
330	Dame Elizabeth Cadbury School
330	Handsworth Wood Boys' School
330	Handsworth Wood Girls' School and Sixth Form Centre
330	Broadway School
330	Cockshut Hill School

Maintained secondary schools in metropolitan cities[1] with sixth forms
Position as at January 1996

LEA Number	*School name*
330	Swanshurst School
330	Bournville School
330	Byng Kenrick Central School
330	Moseley School
330	Sutton Coldfield Girls' School
330	John Willmott School
330	Arthur Terry School
330	Shenley Court School and Sixth Form Centre
330	Plantsbrook School
330	Frankley Community High School
330	St. Paul's School for Girls
330	St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School
330	Bishop Vesey's Grammar School
330	Bishop Walsh School
330	St. Edmund Campion RC School
330	Archbishop Ilsley RC School
330	Baverstock GM School
330	Small Heath School
330	Handsworth Grammar School
330	Great Barr GM School
330	King Edward VI Handsworth School
330	King Edward VI Five Ways School
330	King Edward VI Camp Hill Girls' School
330	King Edward VI Camp Hill School (Boys)
330	King Edward VI Aston School
330	Fairfax School
330	George Dixon GM School
330	King's Norton Girls' School
330	King's Norton Boys' School
Coventry	
331	Barr's Hill School and Community College
331	Stoke Park School and Community College
331	Coundon Court School and Community College
331	The Woodlands School
331	Caludon Castle School
331	Foxford School
331	Lyng Hall School
331	Tile Hill Wood School
331	President Kennedy School and Community College
331	Woodway Park School and Community College
331	Finham Park School
331	Sidney Stringer Community Technology College
331	Ernesford Grange School and Community College
331	Alderman Callow School and Community College
331	Whitley Abbey Comprehensive School
331	Bishop Ullathorne RC School
331	Cardinal Newman RC School and Community College
331	Cardinal Wiseman RC School
331	The Coventry Blue Coat CofE School
Liverpool	
341	West Derby School
341	Holly Lodge Comprehensive School
341	Anfield Community Comprehensive School
341	Breckfield Community Comprehensive School
341	Shorefields Community School
341	Fazakerley High School
341	The Alsop High School Walton
341	The Queen Mary Comprehensive School
341	Croxteth Community Comprehensive School
341	Broadgreen Comprehensive School
341	Childwall Comprehensive School
341	Calderstones Comprehensive School
341	New Heys Comprehensive School
341	Gateacre Community Comprehensive School

Maintained secondary schools in metropolitan cities[1] with sixth forms
Position as at January 1996

LEA Number	*School name*
341	Lee Manor High School
341	Speke Community Comprehensive School
341	King David High School
341	Archbishop Blanch CofE High School
341	Notre Dame High School
341	Campion Boys' RC Comprehensive School
341	St. Mary's RC Girls' Comprehensive School
341	St. John Almond RC High School
341	Pope John Paul II RC High School
341	St. Julie's High School
341	Broughton Hall High School
341	Cardinal Heenan High School
341	St. John Bosco High School
341	De La Salle School
341	Archbishop Beck RC High School
341	St. Francis Xavier's College
341	Our Lady of Fatima High School
341	St. Margaret's CofE High School
341	St. Hilda's CofE High School
341	The Liverpool Blue Coat School
Manchester	
352	Parrs Wood High School
352	Whalley Range 11–18 High School
Sheffield	
373	Silverdale School
373	King Egbert School
373	Tapton School
373	High Storrs School
373	King Edward VII School
373	Notre Dame RC Comprehensive School
373	All Saints' RC School
Bradford	
380	Buttershaw Upper School
380	Belle Vue Boys' School
380	Eccleshill Upper School
380	Wyke Manor Upper School
380	Rhodesway School
380	Bowling Community School
380	Tong Upper School
380	Belle Vue Girls' School
380	Beckfoot Grammar School
380	Greenhead Grammar School
380	Queensbury School
380	Salt Grammar School
380	Nab Wood Grammar School
380	Carlton Bolling College
380	Grange Upper School
380	Ilkley Grammar School
380	St. Bede's RC Grammar School
380	The Holy Family RC School
380	St. Joseph's College
380	Yorkshire Martyrs Collegiate School
380	Bingley Grammar School
380	Hanson GM School
380	Oakbank School
380	Thornton Grammar School
Leeds	
383	Lawnswood School
383	City of Leeds School
383	Allerton High School
383	Allerton Grange School
383	Carr Manor High School
383	Cross Green High School
383	Primrose High School
383	John Smeaton Community High School
383	Temple Moor High School

Maintained secondary schools in metropolitan cities[1] with sixth forms
Position as at January 1996

LEA Number	*School name*
383	Cockburn High School
383	Matthew Murray High School
383	Middleton Park High School
383	The Merlyn Rees High School
383	The Benjamin Gott High School
383	Intake High School
383	Farnley Park High School
383	Wortley High School
383	West Leeds High School
383	Parklands Girls' High School
383	Ralph Thoresby High School
383	Roundhay School
383	Braim Wood High School for Boys
383	Morley High School
383	Pudsey Grangefield School
383	Rodillian School
383	Royds School
383	Woodkirk High School
383	Benton Park School
383	Crawshaw High School
383	Guiseley School
383	Bruntcliffe High School
383	Priesthorpe School
383	Wetherby High School
383	Garforth Community College
383	Brigshaw High School
383	Boston Spa Comprehensive School
383	Horsforth School
383	Prince Henry's Grammar School
383	St. Mary's Comprehensive School
383	Agnes Stewart CofE High School
383	Abbey Grange CofE (GM) High School
Wakefield	
384	Hemsworth High School
384	Ossett School
384	Outwood Grange School
384	Minsthorpe Community College
384	Freeston High School
384	St. Wilfrid's Catholic High School
Newcastle Upon Tyne	
391	West Denton High School
391	Gosforth High School
391	Walbottle Campus
391	Walker School
391	Benfield School
391	Blakelaw School
391	Kenton School
391	Heaton Manor School
391	West Gate Community College
391	St. Mary's RC Comprehensive School
391	St. Cuthbert's High School
391	Sacred Heart RC Comprehensive School
Sunderland	
394	St. Aidan's RC Comprehensive School
394	St. Robert of Newminster RC School
394	St. Anthony's Girls' School

[1] Metropolitan cities are boroughs which have city status under section 1 of the local Government Act 1972.

Primary Schools (Rutland)

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will estimate the total available funding for the financial year 1997–98 for all of Rutland's primary schools if they all chose grant-maintained status. [16842]

Mr. Robin Squire: I cannot make such an estimate. Any GM primary school in Rutland in 1997–98 would receive as annual maintenance grant an amount determined by reference to the local education authority's local management of schools—LMS—scheme, with additional money to reflect its additional responsibilities. The precise amounts also depend on the overall budget decisions which the authority makes.

In addition, GM schools receive special purpose grants and capital grant. Responsibility for determining the amounts of these grants paid to individual schools rests with the Funding Agency for Schools.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how much was spent, and how much is available under the SSA to be spent for each of the primary schools in Rutland for (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96, (iii) 1996–97 and (iv) 1997–98; [16838]

(2) what was the standard spending assessment for education spending on primary schools in Rutland; what was the total actual spending on Rutland's primary schools for (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97; and how much is available under the SSA for 1997–98; [16839]

(3) what research her Department has conducted into the formula for the education SSA for primary schools in the newly unitary Rutland compared with the pattern of actual spending there in each of the three previous years; what factors have been taken into account for sparsity and special needs; and if she will make a statement. [16840]

Mr. Squire: The information is not available in the form in which it has been requested. Neither the total of Leicestershire county council's spending on primary schools nor the education component of the authority's standard spending assessment for the financial years in question can be accurately broken down to the level of individual primary schools in Rutland, primarily due to difficulties in apportioning central spending in support of these schools. I shall write to the hon. Member.

For 1997–98, the new unitary authority for Rutland is free to decide whether to increase funding for primary schools within the overall increase in its budget requirement permitted by the provisional capping rules. There is no allowance within the education standard spending assessment that is comparable with spending on primary schools.

The calculation of education standard spending assessments for Rutland and other authorities is based on an objective formula largely driven by pupil numbers. The cost adjustments for sparsity and additional education needs are defined in the "Local Government Finance Report (England) 1997–98", a copy of which has been placed in the Library. The formula is, and will continue to be, specifically designed not to reflect actual levels of local authority spending on particular areas and all the factors in the formula are independent of the decisions taken by individual authorities. The formula is kept under annual review, in consultation with the local authority associations.

List 99

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many names of

individuals were placed on list 99 in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* 1996; and how many of these names were submitted by the independent education sector. [17115]

Mrs. Gillan: The following table shows the number of names added to list 99 in each of the last three years for which statistics are available. The table also shows the type of establishment in which these individuals were most recently employed. The Department's statistical record does not distinguish between cases reported by the employer and those reported by the police, or other agency.

		Status of last employer		
Period	*Number of names added to list 99*	*Independent school*	*Maintained school*	*Further education establishment*
1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994	59	21	37	1
1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995	98	24	60	14
1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996	81	26	55	0

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers took early retirement under the premature retirement arrangements for teachers in each year since 1990. [17120]

Mrs. Gillan: The number of teachers granted premature retirement for each year from 1990–91 to 1995–96 is given in the following table.

1990–91: 11,692

1991–92: 10,287

1992–93: 12,214

1993–94: 12,233

1994–95: 10,608

1995–96: 13,055.

Education and the Community

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to receive the report from the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority on values in education and the community; and if she will make a statement. [16959]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, expects to receive advice on the final recommendations of the national forum for values in education and the community once the authority has finalised its consultations.

Teachers Pension Scheme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment who had *(a)* trusteeship duties and *(b)* fiduciary duties for the teachers' pension scheme before and after the setting up of the Teachers Pensions Agency. [16918]

Mrs. Gillan: The teachers' superannuation scheme is an unfunded statutory scheme, which does not have trustees. The Secretary of State is accountable to Parliament for the running of the TSS.

Fiduciary duties for the moneys coming into and out of the scheme rest with the permanent secretary of the relevant Department. During the existence of the Teachers Pensions Agency from 1992 to 1996, the chief executive of the agency was appointed as an additional accounting officer to support the permanent secretary in his role as principal accounting officer for the Department.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many early pensions or redundancies were financed by the teachers' pension scheme in *(a)* schools, *(b)* further education and sixth form colleges and *(c)* higher education institutions in each of the past five complete years. [16921]

Mrs. Gillan: The following table shows the number of premature retirements from the teachers' superannuation scheme for each of the years 1991–92 to 1995–96, for schools—maintained and independent—further education and sixth form colleges, and higher education institutions. Redundancy payments are made by teachers' employers.

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Schools	6,908	7,494	8,299	7,725	9,204
FE and Sixth Form Colleges	1,882	3,018	1,822	1,894	2,571
HE Institutions	617	591	745	336	579

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library the actuarial basis referred to in her Department's letter about changes to entitlement on redundancy within the teachers pension scheme to the secretary of the teachers panel; and if she will estimate *(a)* the savings to the scheme costs and *(b)* the extra social security expenditure implied by the changes she proposes. [16944]

Mrs. Gillan: I have placed in the Library a note by the Government Actuary, setting out the method of calculation of the actuarial factors which were referred to in the Department's letter of 17 December 1996 to the secretary of the teachers' panel. The Government Actuary recommends that the employers' contribution rate will be 7.2 per cent., if, as my right hon. Friend has decided, the cost of premature retirement is no longer borne by the scheme, and 8.8 per cent. if it continues to be borne by the scheme. The savings to teachers' employers arising from this difference will be £220 million per annum. It is not possible to say whether there will be extra expenditure on social security as a result of the changes. That will depend on the decisions reached by each individual employer, and the personal circumstances of each teacher who leaves employment. The Government intend premature retirement to continue to be available as a management tool, and has provided funding for that purpose.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will introduce transitional arrangements to dampen the effect of the introduction of the new funding formula on the budget allocation to the Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire training and enterprise council; and if she will make a statement. [16978]

Mr. Paice: Initial budget proposals have been modified to some degree in Milton Keynes chamber of commerce, training and enterprise's favour during contract negotiations between the relevant Government office and the eight TECs in the south-east region.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which Government regional offices have not introduced transitional arrangements to dampen the effect on budgets the implementation of the new funding formula for training and enterprise councils; and who is responsible for making such a decision. [16979]

Mr. Paice: Government offices are responsible for negotiating contracts with TECs within their allocated regional budgets, and are not required to use a particular funding formula.

Blakelaw School, Newcastle

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to take a decision on the proposal of Newcastle LEA to close Blakelaw school, Newcastle; if she intends to set down *(a)* conditions and *(b)* targets as part of her decision; and if she will inform the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central of her decision. [17253]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend will reach a decision on these statutory proposals as soon as possible. Targets and conditions cannot be part of a decision on this type of proposal. The hon. Member will be informed of her decision as soon as it is made.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the schools receiving money from the assisted places scheme by *(a)* parliamentary constituency and *(b)* local education authority. [17123]

Mrs. Gillan: I am placing in the Library a list of the 355 schools participating in the assisted places scheme in England in the current academic year 1996–97. The list shows the parliamentary constituency and the local education authority area in which each school is situated.

Stress-related Illness

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her Department's estimate of the number of working days lost by teachers as a result of stress-related illness in each of the past 10 years. [17456]

Mr. Forth: This information is not collected by the Department.

International Labour Organisation Conference

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the Government's policy at the forthcoming ILO conference in respect of the protection of British citizens working *(a)* within and *(b)* outside the European Union. [17434]

Mr. Paice: The Government will be seeking to ensure that the basic protections of British citizens are taken into account in all discussions.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment who will be representing the Government at the ILO conference in Geneva. [17390]

Mr. Paice: The United Kingdom will, as in previous years, be sending a tripartite delegation to the ILO conference. The members of that delegation have not yet been appointed.

School Performance Tables

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 12 February, *Official Report*, column 229, what is the total outturn cost of publishing the school performance tables of key stage 2 results for 1996. [16600]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* The outturn cost of the key stage 2 performance tables is not yet available. The cost of the 1996 secondary school and 16 to 18 tables, which listed some 5,500 institutions, was £1·4 million. Key stage 2 tables will list some 14,500 schools, but are likely to cost rather less.

Astra Group

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the timetable for the production of accounts for the Astra Group pension scheme for the year ended 30 April 1994 and subsequent years; if she will investigate the way in which the trustees are carrying out their duties; what assessment she has made of the actuarial valuation made *(a)* before and *(b)* after privatisation; and if she will make a statement. [16939]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* Production of the company accounts of the former Astra group, and those of its pension scheme are not matters for this or any Government Department, though the Department of Trade and Industry can confirm the statutory timetables set for production of company accounts.

The timetable for production of the Astra accounts is a matter to be taken up with the receivers for the Astra group—Arthur Anderson Ltd, or with the current trustees for the pension scheme—Fountain Trustee Ltd.

It is not appropriate for this Department to investigate the manner in which the trustees of the pension scheme have carried out their duties. If the members of the scheme are concerned that the actions of the trustees, or their advisers, do not comply with legal or professional requirements, then they may consider seeking recourse under a variety of routes.

As the pension scheme in question was established with effect from the date of the privatisation of the Government skillscentre involved in the Astra purchase, there was no valuation of the fund by the Government Actuary's department before the transfer. The financing of the pension scheme was entirely a matter for the company and the trustees of the pension scheme in conjunction with their actuarial advisors, who are understood to be Coopers and Lybrand.

The Secretary of State is unable to comment further on these issues.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the private employment agencies used by her Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for her Department, *(c)* the total cost to her Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16189]

Mr. Sproat: The information for my Department, and the two agencies for which it is responsible—the Historic Royal Palaces Agency (HRPA) and the Royal Parks Agency (RPA), is as follows:–

(a) Agencies used in the last three years.

Josephine Sammons, Manpower, Office Angels, Reinforcements, PRC Employment, Alfred Marks, Montrose Technical Recruitment, Hays Accountancy Personnel, Accountancy Selection, Adecco UK Ltd., Initial Contract Services, Kelly Services, Church Street Recruitment, Montrose, Adia Alfred Marks, Pipco Ltd., Harris Jones Recruitment, Huntley Cartwright, Roberts Associates, MTS Group, Abacus, Masterlock, The Peepul Bureau, Recruit, PD Bureau, and ADIA.

(b) Numbers employed by the agencies in work for the Department and its agencies

Year	*Total*	*DNH*	*HRPA*	*RPA*
1994–95	79	21	48	10
1995–96	126	22	87	17
1996–97	148	20	123	5

Note:
These figures include successive agency staff filling the same posts.

(c) Total cost to the Department and its Agencies

Year	*Total*	*DNH*	*HRPA*	*RPA*
1994–95	£335,388	n/a	£294,388	£41,000
1995–96	£771,892	£354,102	£403,790	£14,000
1996–97[1]	£743,420	£330,000	£403,420	£10,000

[1] Estimated costs.

Median costs are not available.

(d) Many of these contracts are with the agencies to supply staff, not with individuals; hence no average length of contract is available.

Crystal Palace Recreation Centre and Stadium

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions she has had with *(a)* Bromley council and *(b)* the Central Council for Physical Recreation about the future of Crystal Palace recreation centre and stadium. [16883]

Mr. Sproat: None. I refer to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) on 19 February, *Official Report*, column *585*. Discussions about the future of facilities at Crystal Palace national sports centre are a matter for the English Sports Council.

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will ensure that the athletic track and facilities at the Crystal Palace recreation centre will remain fully available for athletes training for Olympic athletics until adequate international class facilities are provided elsewhere in London. [16938]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* An independent feasibility study is being undertaken on behalf of the London borough of Bromley and the English Sports Council to determine the future need for, and uses of, the Crystal Palace national sports centre. This is part of an ongoing commitment by the English Sports Council to ensure the provision of top class facilities for athletes. The lottery sports fund has to date made 32 awards to athletics for the development of new facilities. The total of these awards is £22,399,841.

While discussions on the future of Crystal Palace national sports centre continue, the English Sports Council recognises that provision needs to be made both for competition and for training in London generally and in south London in particular. It is currently considering where such facilities can best be provided.

British Broadcasting Corporation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage by what mechanism she ensures that the BBC meets the requirements of its charter with particular reference to political impartiality; and if she will make a statement. [16957]

Mr. Sproat: Under the terms of the new charter and agreement, it is for the BBC board of governors to ensure that the corporation is meeting its obligations to the public. Under the agreement, the BBC is required to treat controversial subjects with due accuracy and impartiality, both in the corporation's news services and in the more general field of programmes dealing with matters of public policy or of political or industrial

controversy. Central to this obligation is the duty on the corporation to draw up a new code of guidance on how it is to meet its obligations of due accuracy and impartiality. The governors have a specific duty to ensure compliance with this code by all BBC employees and programme makers. The code was published on 13 November 1996 as part of the corporation's revised "Producers' Guidelines", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

British Academy of Sport

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she will be announcing the further shortlist for the British Academy of Sport. [16663]

Mr. Sproat: I will be announcing the final shortlist on the morning of 25 February and copies of the announcement will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which *(a)* and *(b)* have attended, indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16579]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Ministers attend Scottish Grand Committee meetings as part of their normal parliamentary duties and officials attend as necessary as part of their normal departmental duties. Expenditure falling to my Department has been limited to travelling costs. The names of Scottish Office Ministers who have attended meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee held in Scotland since December 1994 can be found in the *Official Report* of each of these meetings.

Health Service Staff Contracts

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff employed by NHS trusts or health boards are on local contracts outwith Whitley agreements. [16744]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is not held centrally.

Unfit Housing

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of housing stock in each local authority was designated as unfit for habitation in each year since 1990. [17232]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The term "unfit for habitation" is not used in Scotland. The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 sets out the criteria for a dwelling to meet the tolerable standard, which is the relevant standard in Scotland. Local authority estimates of the number of dwellings which fall below the tolerable standard are published annually in the Scottish Office statistical bulletin housing series, bulletins HSG/1992/4, HSG/1992/7, HSG/1994/6, HSG/1994/8 and HSG/1996/2. These bulletins are available in the House Library. The most recent estimates, for April 1996, are due to be published on 27 February 1997. A copy of the relevant bulletin (HSG/1997/1) will also be placed in the House Library.

Pesca Schemes (Berwickshire)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the Pesca-funded schemes agreed by the EU for projects located in the Berwickshire area over the past 12 months indicating the title of the project, the amount of funding, the starting date for the scheme, and the date when the funds were made available to the organisers carrying out the schemes; [16986]

(2) how many Pesca-funded schemes agreed by the EU for projects located in the Berwickshire area over the past 12 months are awaiting payment for work completed; [16987]

(3) what factors have led to the delay in payment of Pesca funding from the EU for projects agreed in the Berwickshire area over the past 12 months; [16988]

(4) what steps he proposes to take to ensure payment of outstanding funds to organisations in Berwickshire undertaking Pesca-funded projects. [16989]

Mr. Kynoch: Pesca is delivered in eligible areas in Scotland through local Pesca groups—LPGs. The Scottish Office has approved a business plan for each LPG detailing the budget and criteria for selecting individual projects at local level. Each LPG has begun to implement its business plan and approve projects. Detailed lists of projects will be provided in annual reports from the LPGs for collation by the Scottish Office and transmission to the European Commission in June 1997.

The need to establish administrative arrangements which achieved the greatest delegation of responsibility to local areas while ensuring proper accountability delayed the operation of Pesca in Scotland. It is to the credit of all concerned that we now have an acceptable balance. The Scottish sub-programmes are now operating ahead of most of the rest of the UK. By the end of this financial year, the Scottish Office will have disbursed all due Pesca funds.

The Borders LPG, which incorporates Berwickshire, has a programme allocation of 1.34 mecu—£1,047 million approximately—for the period 1995–99. On receipt of a first claim from the group for expenditure defrayed in 1996, Scottish Office officials will visit the group to ensure that suitable administrative systems are in place, and a first advance of Pesca funds will be released.

Capital Receipts

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were total capital receipts in respect of the right to buy from *(a)* council tenants, *(b)* Scottish Homes tenants, *(c)* new town tenants and *(d)* other public sector tenants in Scotland in each year from 1979–80 to 1995–96. [17226]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The available information is set out in the table.

Total capital receipts under the right to buy scheme Scotland 1980–81 to 1995–96

Period	(a) Local Authority (£ million)	(b) Scottish Homes (£ million)	(c) New Towns (£ million)
1980–81	23.49	15.21	11.58
1981–82	61.22	17.17	15.90
1982–83	101.28	18.69	14.59
1983–84	121.21	30.63	21.09
1984–85	115.58	34.89	19.71
1985–86	104.37	25.19	15.85
1986–87	116.33	22.42	19.29
1987–88	166.27	43.99	25.51
1988–89	254.03	79.74	28.68
1989–90	300.63	61.93	47.11
1990–91	256.71	30.42	36.11
1991–92	239.17	32.82	24.49
1992–93	251.41	32.11	22.21

Total capital receipts under the right to buy scheme Scotland 1980–81 to 1995–96

Period	(a) Local Authority (£ million)	(b) Scottish Homes (£ million)	(c) New Towns (£ million)
1993–94	236.97	38.06	24.57
1994–95	243.42	34.24	28.76
1995–96[1]	179.45	24.39	20.83

[1] Eight local authorities have not yet provided figures for all or part of the year.

Farm Holdings

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many individual farm units in Scotland outside environmentally sensitive areas are *(a)* under 40, *(b)* 41 to 50, *(c)* 61 to 70, *(d)* 71 to 80 and *(e)* over 80 hectares; and what is the total area of farmland outside the ESAs. [17255]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The estimated data are shown in the table:

Size group (ha)	Farm units	Area (ha)
Under 40	30,288	
40–49.9	1,581	
50–59.9	1,358	
60–69.9	1,256	
70–79.9	1,042	
Over 80	9,651	
Total	45,176	4,508,048

Hospital Beds

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average daily number of hospital beds in general and acute specialties in each health authority in Scotland in *(a)* 1982, *(b)* 1990–91, *(c)* 1991–92 and *(d)* 1995–96. [17246]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table.

Average available staffed beds in acute specialties[1] as at 31 March

	1982	1991	1992	1996
Argyll and Clyde	1,394	1,315	1,286	1,140
Ayrshire and Arran	1,085	1,138	1,152	971
Borders	337	349	354	336
Dumfries and Galloway	455	447	435	416
Fife	905	863	851	754
Forth Valley	771	625	605	573
Grampian	1,932	1,618	1,640	1,804
Greater Glasgow	5,759	4,615	4,194	3,581
Highland	850	736	740	796
Lanarkshire	1,917	1,691	1,665	1,526
Lothian	3,791	2,855	2,659	2,300
Orkney	58	62	62	85
Shetland	62	53	49	46
Tayside	2,070	1,862	1,801	1,540
Western Isles	83	87	85	95
Scotland	21,468	18,317	17,580	15,963

[1] Includes acute, supra-area and special categories specialty groups. Excludes obstetrics.

Class Sizes

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average class size in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools; and what has been the percentage change since 1992. [17250]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Statistics on class size are collected biennially. The available information is set out in the following table.

Average class size in publicly funded primary and secondary schools in Scotland

Sector	September 1991	September 1993	September 1995	Percentage change 1991–95
Primary	24.7	24.7	24.8	0.4
Secondary	18.9	19.3	19.5	3.2

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of children were taught in classes of more than 31 pupils in *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93, *(c)* 1993–94, *(d)* 1994–95 and *(e)* 1995–96. [17249]

Mr. Robertson: Statistics on class size in primary schools are collected biennially. The available information is given in the table. Information on individual class sizes in secondary schools is not collected centrally.

Pupils in classes of over 31 in primary schools in Scotland

As at September	Number	Percentage of pupils
1991	45,079	10.2
1993	47,665	10.9
1995	51,955	11.8

Education Spending

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the standard spending assessment per pupil in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary education in each year from 1991 to 1996 for each local education authority. [17252]

Mr. Kynoch: Standard spending assessments do not apply in Scotland. The equivalent figures for Scottish local authorities are grant aided expenditure assessments—GAEs. Information on relevant GAE per pupil is provided in the tables. Only the GAEs for teaching costs differentiate between primary and secondary education.

Grant aided expenditure per pupil[1] 1991–92 to 1995–96

Primary school teaching staff *(£s per pupil)*

	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
Borders	1,126	1,144	1,189	1,216	1,211
Central	987	1,068	1,112	1,137	1,142
Dumfries	1,125	1,173	1,226	1,269	1,254

Grant aided expenditure per pupil[1] 1991–92 to 1995–96

Primary school teaching staff *(£s per pupil)*

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Fife	1,050	1,064	1,105	1,129	1,133
Grampian	1,058	1,103	1,150	1,177	1,174
Highland	1,136	1,173	1,224	1,259	1,250
Lothian	973	1,057	1,100	1,123	1,126
Strathclyde	957	1,056	1,097	1,121	1,125
Tayside	1,002	1,093	1,136	1,164	1,165
Orkney	1,218	1,296	1,359	1,349	1,308
Shetland	1,218	1,258	1,334	1,353	1,340
Western Isles	1,218	1,326	1,390	1,480	1,434

[1] Pupil numbers as used in the calculation of the GAE for the year, as shown in the relevant edition of the Green Book.

Grant aided expenditure per pupil[1] 1991–92 to 1995–96

Secondary school teaching staff *(£s per pupil)*

	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
Borders	1,793	2,008	2,052	2,059	2,006
Central	1,793	2,008	2,052	2,059	2,006
Dumfries	1,793	2,008	2,052	2,059	2,006
Fife	1,793	2,008	2,052	2,059	2,006
Grampian	1,793	2,008	2,052	2,059	2,006
Highland	1,793	2,008	2,052	2,059	2,006
Lothian	1,793	2,008	2,052	2,059	2,006
Strathclyde	1,793	2,008	2,052	2,059	2,006
Tayside	1,793	2,008	2,052	2,059	2,006
Orkney	2,185	2,503	2,724	2,777	2,714
Shetland	2,185	2,503	2,724	2,777	2,714
Western Isles	2,185	2,503	2,724	2,777	2,714

[1] Pupil numbers as used in the calculation of the GAE for the year, as shown in the relevant edition of the Green Book.

Grant aided expenditure per pupil[1] 1991–92 to 1995–96
Relevant education GAE[2] not attributable to either sector

(£s per pupil)

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Borders	1,034	1,069	1,060	1,072	1,070
Central	1,015	1,054	1,076	1,082	1,075
Dumfries	1,069	1,108	1,092	1,106	1,104
Fife	1,031	1,068	1,093	1,097	1,081
Grampian	1,021	1,058	1,041	1,058	1,062
Highland	1,068	1,107	1,111	1,120	1,120
Lothian	1,039	1,090	1,100	1,103	1,091
Strathclyde	1,073	1,120	1,151	1,155	1,140
Tayside	1,044	1,079	1,090	1,091	1,085
Orkney	1,194	1,242	1,202	1,211	1,224
Shetland	1,217	1,249	1,201	1,208	1,215
Western Isles	1,239	1,250	1,209	1,166	1,163

[1] Pupil numbers as used in the calculation of the GAE for the year, as shown in the relevant edition of the Green Book.
[2] Relevant GAE includes: Teachers for deprivation/Ethnic minorities, school transport, school bursaries and school meals.

Grant aided expenditure per pupil[1] 1996–97

Primary school teaching staff		*Secondary school teaching staff*		*Relevant education GAE[2] not attributable to either sector*	
	GAE/PUPI (£)		*GAE/PUPI (£)*		*GAE/PUPI (£)*
Aberdeen	1,134	Aberdeen	2,030	Aberdeen	1,050
Aberdeenshire	1,253	Aberdeenshire	2,030	Aberdeenshire	1,081
Angus	1,219	Angus	2,030	Angus	1,069
Argyll and Bute	1,311	Argyll and Bute	2,030	Argyll and Bute	1,142
Clackmannan	1,143	Clackmannan	2,030	Clackmannan	1,112
Dumfries and Galloway	1,295	Dumfries and Galloway	2,030	Dumfries and Galloway	1,112
Dundee	1,134	Dundee	2,030	Dundee	1,112
East Ayrshire	1,154	East Ayrshire	2,030	East Ayrshire	1,114
East Dunbartonshire	1,139	East Dunbartonshire	2,030	East Dunbartonshire	1,059
East Lothian	1,175	East Lothian	2,030	East Lothian	1,089
East Renfrewshire	1,134	East Renfrewshire	2,030	East Renfrewshire	1,074
Edinburgh	1,134	Edinburgh	2,030	Edinburgh	1,123
Falkirk	1,154	Falkirk	2,030	Falkirk	1,071
Fife	1,157	Fife	2,030	Fife	1,099
Glasgow	1,134	Glasgow	2,030	Glasgow	1,321
Highland	1,292	Highland	2,030	Highland	1,134
Inverclyde	1,134	Inverclyde	2,030	Inverclyde	1,144
Midlothian	1,165	Midlothian	2,030	Midlothian	1,066
Moray	1,201	Moray	2,030	Moray	1,084
North Ayrshire	1,151	North Ayrshire	2,030	North Ayrshire	1,127
North Lanarkshire	1,139	North Lanarkshire	2,030	North Lanarkshire	1,103
Orkney	1,361	Orkney	2,691	Orkney	1,260
Perth and Kinross	1,231	Perth and Kinross	2,030	Perth and Kinross	1,101
Renfrewshire	1,134	Renfrewshire	2,030	Renfrewshire	1,110
Scottish Borders	1,244	Scottish Borders	2,030	Scottish Borders	1,073
Shetland	1,398	Shetland	2,691	Shetland	1,251
South Ayrshire	1,172	South Ayrshire	2,030	South Ayrshire	1,097

Grant aided expenditure per pupil[1] 1996–97

Primary school teaching staff	*GAE/PUPI (£)*	*Secondary school teaching staff*	*GAE/PUPI (£)*	*Relevant education GAE[2] not attributable to either sector*	*GAE/PUPI (£)*
South Lanarkshire	1,156	South Lanarkshire	2,030	South Lanarkshire	1,096
Stirling	1,207	Stirling	2,030	Stirling	1,113
West Dunbartonshire	1,141	West Dunbartonshire	2,030	West Dunbartonshire	1,148
West Lothian	1,151	West Lothian	2,030	West Lothian	1,085
Western Isles	1,468	Western Isles	2,691	Western Isles	1,152

[1] Pupil numbers as used in the calculation of the GAE for the year, as shown in the relevant edition of the Green Book.
[2] Relevant GAE includes: Teachers for deprivation/Ethnic Minorities, School Transport, School Bursaries and School Meals.

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the spending per pupil in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary education in each year from 1991 to 1996 for each local education authority. [17251]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information is given in the table. 1994–95 is the latest financial year for which actual expenditure information is currently available. The figures do not include the cost of home to school transport, school meals, education authority central administration costs and loan charges.

Net current expenditure per pupil (£ at out-turn prices)

Regional/Islands Council	*1991–92*		*1992–93*		*1993–94*		*1994–95*	
	Primary	*Secondary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*
Borders	1,728	2,744	1,885	2,857	1,935	2,873	1,943	2,941
Central	1,606	2,715	1,722	2,801	1,733	2,785	1,724	2,761
Dumfries and Galloway	1,644	2,833	1,745	2,957	1,749	2,876	1,719	2,894
Fife	1,631	2,551	1,729	2,636	1,721	2,569	1,752	2,597
Grampian	1,637	2,882	1,842	3,031	1,805	2,958	1,774	2,862
Highland	1,767	2,797	1,907	2,896	1,970	2,914	2,000	2,975
Lothian	1,538	2,911	1,659	3,047	1,650	2,963	1,695	2,959
Strathclyde	1,646	2,820	1,763	2,842	1,769	2,769	1,811	2,831
Tayside	1,538	2,890	1,709	3,036	1,711	2,878	1,766	2,946
Orkney	2,039	3,657	2,106	3,827	2,560	3,464	2,537	3,576
Shetland	1,962	4,341	2,382	4,492	2,945	4,948	2,576	5,104
Western Isles	2,117	3,680	2,429	4,297	2,390	4,200	2,490	4,405

Note:
The figures have been compiled from local authority financial returns.

Countryside Premium Scheme

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase the upper level of the countryside premium scheme, and if he will make a statement. [17257]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Details of payments for the countryside premium scheme were announced on 31 January. There are no plans to introduce any changes, but all elements of the scheme will be kept under review once it has been launched.

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of farms expected to join the Scottish countryside premium scheme in 1997–98 and 1998–99; and if these figures were made available to the European Commission during his discussions about the introduction of the scheme. [17256]

Mr. Robertson: We have made no estimate of the number of farms expected to join the scheme in 1997–98 and 1998–99 but we anticipate a considerable degree of interest.

Nursery School Pupils

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* three year-olds and *(b)* four year-olds there were in nursery schools and classes in each education authority; and what percentage these figures represent of all children in those age groups in the authority area. [17248]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information requested for 1995 is set out in the following table. Figures for 1996 are not yet available. Schools have been allocated to their current education authority.

Pupils aged three and four in Education Authority nursery schools and classes, as at September 1995

	Aged three[1]		*Aged four[1]*	
Education authority	*Number*	*Percentage of population*	*Number*	*Percentage of population*
Scotland	12,634	19	35,331	53
Aberdeen City	488	18	1,718	65
Aberdeenshire	141	4	1,756	57
Angus	92	6	816	58
Argyll and Bute	53	5	112	10
Clackmannanshire	171	26	495	76
Dumfries and Galloway	178	10	1,342	72
Dundee City	721	39	1,422	73
East Ayrshire	466	27	1,094	65
East Dunbartonshire	40	3	124	9
East Lothian	340	27	897	77
East Renfrewshire	155	13	366	32
Edinburgh, City of	1,574	30	3,355	64
Falkirk	344	18	1,324	68
Fife	775	17	3,506	77
Glasgow, City of	3,198	38	5,372	68
Highland	130	5	705	26
Inverclyde	183	16	425	36

Pupils aged three and four in Education Authority nursery schools and classes, as at September 1995

Education authority	Aged three[1] Number	Aged three[1] Percentage of population	Aged four[1] Number	Aged four[1] Percentage of population
Midlothian	321	29	845	76
Moray	42	3	659	57
North Ayrshire	150	8	325	18
North Lanarkshire	590	13	1,430	33
Orkney Islands	41	15	160	60
Perth and Kinross	268	17	886	54
Renfrewshire	392	16	1,071	45
Scottish Borders	37	3	524	40
Shetland Islands	91	26	197	57
South Ayrshire	128	9	454	34
South Lanarkshire	348	8	832	21
Stirling	199	20	637	65
West Dunbartonshire	428	33	887	70
West Lothian	550	26	1,595	78
Western Isles	—	—	—	—

[1] Age as at 31 December 1995.

Housing Waiting Lists

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were on each local authority housing waiting list for each year since 1990. [17229]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Information in the form requested is not held centrally.

Passenger and Cargo Flights (USA)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action Scottish Enterprise is making to encourage direct passenger and cargo flights between Scotland and the United States of America; and if he will make a statement. [17237]

Mr. Kynoch: The progress made by Scottish Enterprise in promoting direct air links with the United States of America has been greatly assisted by the changes which the Government have introduced to give airports and airlines the freedom of choice to operate scheduled and chartered flights from any Scottish airport wherever it is judged that such flights would be commercially viable. We have also indicated to the United States' Government that we favour the further extension of long-haul cargo liberalisation. The contribution made by Scottish Enterprise to the development of these policies has been invaluable.

While the establishment of air services is ultimately a commercial matter for the operators, Scottish Enterprise has pursued a range of initiatives designed to promote the expansion of Scotland's direct air links with the USA. I have asked the chairman of Scottish Enterprise to write to the hon. Member.

Cancelled Operations

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many operations were cancelled on the day of, or after, the patient's admission to hospital in each health authority in Scotland for each quarter in 1994–95 and 1995–96; and what was the percentage change between the two years. [17247]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on cancellations of operations following admission to hospital is not held centrally. Total figures for cancellations of planned admissions for in-patient and day case treatment are in the table. The number of cancellations involved is very small in relation to the total number of admissions.

Cancellations of hospital admission by health board area of treatment: quarters ending 30 June 1994–31 March 1996

	1994–95				1995–96				Percentage change between 1994–95 to 1995–96
	June	September	December	March	June	September	December	March	
Argyll and Clyde	34	34	34	14	42	43	63	71	88.8
Ayrshire and Arran	76	92	77	94	56	34	34	45	-50.1
Borders	52	29	21	37	50	41	17	46	10.8
Dumfries and Galloway	15	6	6	8	1	4	14	18	5.7
Fife	99	93	98	125	79	89	129	197	19.0
Forth Valley	2	6	10	9	20	19	30	29	263.0
Grampian	234	255	206	247	232	306	259	194	5.2
Greater Glasgow	316	313	335	303	350	406	355	510	27.9
Highland	124	192	131	165	149	191	134	245	17.5
Lanarkshire	36	40	30	52	40	57	61	86	54.4
Lothian	335	413	395	444	280	383	335	623	2.1
Orkney	3	5	—	3	1	—	3	—	-63.6
Shetland	25	3	7	12	6	4	—	—	-78.7
Tayside	106	93	89	119	91	146	132	267	56.3
Western Isles	—	—	1	—	—	—	3	2	400.0
Scotland	1,457	1,574	1,440	1,632	1,397	1,723	1,569	2,333	15.1

Note:
The figures cover the 7 key specialties of general surgery, ENT surgery, ophthalmology, orthopaedic surgery, urology, gynaecology and plastic surgery, which comprise around 90 per cent. of admissions from waiting lists.

Hospital Payphones

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will instruct NHS hospital trusts that normal BT callbox charges should apply to all payphones within hospitals. [17394]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. This is a matter for trusts to determine at local level.

Right-to-buy Discounts

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total value of discounts for right to buy for *(a)* council tenants, *(b)* Scottish Homes tenants, *(c)* new town tenants and *(d)* other public sector tenants in Scotland in each year from 1979–80 to 1995–96. [17225]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The available information is set out in the table.

Total value of discounts under the right to buy scheme<paScotland 1980–81 to 1995–96

Period	*(a) Local authority (£ million)*	*(b) Scottish homes (£ million)*	*(c) New towns (£ million)*
1980–81	19.49	10.22	7.98
1981–82	50.33	12.30	10.71
1982–93	82.30	12.75	9.42
1983–84	96.20	21.21	13.35
1984–85	97.84	26.26	13.84
1985–86	98.89	20.61	11.21
1986–87	111.07	19.68	16.79
1987–88	196.52	42.25	24.10
1988–89	317.97	84.75	27.97
1989–90	402.21	71.18	48.37
1990–91	356.30	34.44	37.76
1991–92	319.63	34.87	24.54
1992–93	327.26	33.93	21.56
1993–94	299.87	41.14	24.55
1994–95	306.15	39.07	29.27
1995–96[1]	226.89	27.98	21.42

[1] Eight local authorities have not yet provided figures for all or part of the year.

Incapable Adults

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress he has made in considering the Scottish Law Commission report on incapable adults, Scot Law Com No. 151. [17534]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: On 18 June of last year, I informed my right hon. Friend that I had been giving careful consideration to the Scottish Law Commission's report on incapable adults. I recognised that the report raises a number of issues which are both important and sensitive, and proposes many changes in the law relating to legal procedures for looking after the property, financial affairs and personal welfare of mentally incapable adults.

I therefore announced that, before legislating on the basis of the commission's proposals, there should be further consideration. I have today issued a consultation paper and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Medical Negligence Claims

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many outstanding medical negligence claims there are for each health board area; if he will indicate the amount involved; what budget provisions have been made; and if he will make a statement. [17360]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of outstanding medical negligence claims for each health board area is set out in the table:

Health boards	*Number of cases*
Argyll and Clyde	131
Ayrshire and Arran	68
Borders	10
Dumfries and Galloway	34
Fife	59
Forth Valley	69
Grampian	81
Greater Glasgow	418
Highland	72
Lanarkshire	140
Lothian	222
Orkney	2
Shetland	6
Tayside	117
Western Isles	5
Total	1,434

It is not possible to predict the actual amounts as the level of settlement is generally not known until an agreement between the parties has been reached. It is for individual health authorities to determine the annual provision for claims likely to be settled against them in any one year.

EU Finance

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much EC funding to Scotland *(a)* in total and *(b)* by category of funding (i) was provided in 1995–96 and (ii) he estimates will be provided in 1996–97. [13797]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The table shows the amount awarded to Scottish structural funds programmes from the European regional development fund—ERDF—and the European social fund—ESF. The data are provided by calendar year, rather than by financial year, as the single programming documents—SPD—allocate resources on an annual basis. New SPDs for the two objective 2 programmes for the period 1997–99 are currently being negotiated with the Commission. The 1997 objective 2 figures are therefore provisional.

Mecu/£ million (1 ecu = £0.73)

Programme	*1995*		*1996*		*1997*	
	ERDF	*ESF*	*ERDF*	*ESF*	*ERDF*	*ESF*
Highlands and Islands Objective 1	26.84 (19.59)	8.7 (6.35)	28.39 (20.72)	9.2 (6.72)	30.87 (31.6)	9.40 (6.86)
Western Scotland Objective 2	73.89 (53.94)	20.91 (15.26)	76.18 (55.61)	22.13 (16.15)	79 (57.67)	22.33 (16.3)
Eastern Scotland Objective 2	32.08 (23.42)	8.02 (5.85)	33.95 (24.78)	8.02 (5.85)	35.6 (25.99)	9.08 (6.63)
Borders Objective 5b	3.22 (2.35)	0.95 (0.69)	3.73 (2.72)	1.1 (0.8)	3.08 (2.25)	1.1 (0.8)
Dumfries and Galloway Objective 5b	5.36 (3.91)	1.07 (0.78)	6.2 (4.53)	1.24 (0.91)	6.24 (4.56)	1.25 (0.91)

Mecu/£ million (1 ecu = £0.73)

Programme	*1995*		*1996*		*1997*	
	ERDF	*ESF*	*ERDF*	*ESF*	*ERDF*	*ESF*
North and West Grampian Objective 5b	4.4 (3.21)	0.96 (0.7)	5.08 (3.71)	1.11 (0.81)	5.12 (3.74)	1.11 (0.81)
Rural Stirling/Upland Tayside Objective 5b	2.67 (1.95)	0.79 (0.58)	3.09 (2.26)	0.91 (0.66)	3.11 (2.27)	0.92 (0.67)

Further funds are drawn down from ESF under objective 3 and the human resource community initiatives—employment and adapt. These form part of UK-wide programmes, and the single programming documents do not allocate Scottish shares. However, in 1995 and 1996, 66 mecu—£48.18 million—and 77 mecu—£56.21 million—respectively were awarded to Scottish projects.

Scotland also receives funds from a number of Community initiatives. Initiatives represent some 9 per cent. of the structural funds budget and apply across the Community drawing funds from the ERDF, the ESF, the European agricultural guarantee and guidance fund—EAGGF—guidance section, and the financial instrument for fisheries guidance—FIFG. The table indicates allocations to Scotland, based on the value of Scottish CI programmes and Scotland's share of Great Britain or United Kingdom programmes.

Mecu (£s)

(1 ecu = £0.73)

Community initiatives	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
ERDF	9.020 (6.58)	26.65 (19.45)	23.557 (17.2)
ESF	2.336 (1.71)	6.805 (4.97)	5.966 (4.36)
EAGGF-Guidance	0.568 (0.41)	0.736 (0.54)	0.736 (0.54)
FIFG	0.586 (0.43)	0.888 (0.65)	1.005 (0.73)

Scotland receives funding from the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund, and from the financial instrument for fisheries guidance in addition to that indicated above. Figures are available only in sterling for actual and estimated expenditure for the financial years 1995–96 and 1996–97, and is not therefore directly comparable with the annual allocations contained in SPDs. The following table shows all of the EC spending on CAP on-farm schemes, the funding of marketing and processing schemes, FIFG expenditure, and reimbursed contributions for hill livestock compensatory allowances. It includes expenditure through EAGGF and FIFG in objective 1 and 5b areas.

£ million

Fund	*1995–96*	*1996–97 (estimated)*
EAGGF-Guarantee	347	426
EAGGF-Guidance	12	12
FIFG	5	4

Scottish farmers also benefit significantly from market support arrangements administered by the Intervention Board executive agency. However, expenditure in Scotland is not separately identified, and details are not therefore available.

There is also direct spending by the Commission in Scotland in other areas such as research and development and the arts. However, figures are not held centrally.

Sheep Dip Waste

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information is held by his Department on the work of the Scotland and Northern Ireland forum for environmental research; what assessment he has made of the research proposed by that body into the treatment of sheep dip waste in the context of its disposal in an environmentally safe manner; what funding is available to that body for projects of this kind; and if he will make a statement. [16008]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* The Scottish Office, along with the Department of the Environment Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, are members of the Scotland and Northern Ireland forum for environmental research. As members, the Scottish Office is aware of the forum's activities, including details of its research programme. The forum has a current project to develop environmental quality standards for sheep dip products. Any assessment would have to await the completion of the project. The forum has a budget of £0.5 million per annum.

TRANSPORT

Drivers (Drugs)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department is taking to make information available to motorists on the effect that *(a)* prescribed and *(b)* non-prescribed drugs may have on their driving capability. [16930]

Mr. Bowis: We give advice under the 'Highway Code' which states:

> "You MUST NOT drive under the influence of drugs or medicines. When taking prescribed medicines, ask your doctor if it is safe to drive. When taking other medicines, ask a pharmacist".

Drivers should heed the advice of their doctor or pharmacist and comply with the information provided by the drug company. The packaging of all prescription drugs which affect the central nervous system is required by law to carry warnings advising patients not to drive. For non-prescribed drugs, the only products likely to affect driving capability in recommended doses are anti-histamines and the packaging is labelled accordingly in these cases.

We shall consider any further action in the light of findings from the survey of drugs in road fatalities that we are currently undertaking.

Road Accidents (Drugs)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statistics are collated on the link between road traffic accidents and *(a)* prescribed, *(b)* non-prescribed and *(c)* illegal drugs. [16929]

Mr. Bowis: National statistics on the link between road traffic accidents and drugs are not collected on a routine basis.

A large study by the Transport Research Laboratory—1,273 casualties—which reported in 1989 showed that, in fatal accidents to all road users, the incidence of alcohol, at any level—35 per cent.—was over six times higher than that of prescription drugs—5.5 per cent. Illegal drugs, such as cannabis, were present in lower proportions—2.9 per cent. of cases.

We recently began a further three-year survey of drugs in road fatalities to update our knowledge in this area.

South West Trains

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many letters his Department has received in 1997 to date on the subject of South West Trains; and if he will make a statement. [16681]

Mr. Watts: My Department and the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising received 38 representations between 1 January and 19 February 1997 relating to various aspects of South West Trains' business. The franchisee's obligations under the franchise agreement are a matter for the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising.

Marine Pollution

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what additional claims he expects on the international oil pollution compensation fund from the private sector relating to the Sea Empress disaster, which are not accounted for by the expenditure of the marine pollution control unit; [17462]

(2) what is his estimate of the claim made by the advisers on the international oil pollution compensation fund relating to the Sea Empress disaster; [17453]

(3) how much has been spent to date on the Sea Empress clean up operation by *(a)* the marine pollution control unit, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* private organisations. [17461]

Mr. Bowis: The Department's high and low estimate of likely compensation claims are as follows:

Likely claims (£ million)	*Low*	*High*
Clean-up operations (Marine Pollution Control Unit)	10	10
Clean-up operations (local authorities)	8	8
Clean-up operations (voluntary organisations, oil industry and others)	5	5
Preventative measures (including salvage costs)	0	7
Fishing Industry	8	10
Tourist Industry	3	9
Total	34	49

It is estimated that about £22 million has been spent to date on clean-up operations: consisting of £10 million by the MPCU, £7 million by local authorities and £5 million by others.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the basis of the claim on the international oil pollution compensation fund by the advisers involved in Sea Empress salvage operation. [17460]

Mr. Bowis: No claim has yet been made to the international oil pollution compensation fund in respect of the salvage operation of the Sea Empress. The timing of any such claim may relate to the salvage award made under the contract between the shipowner and the salvors. Salvage operations may in some circumstances be eligible for compensation by the IOPC fund, but only to the extent that the purpose of the operations is to prevent pollution.

Royal Train

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times the royal train has been used since 1 May 1996. [17283]

Mr. Watts: Between 1 May 1996 and 21 February 1997, the royal train was used on 25 occasions.

Lorry Weights

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to publish the responses to his consultation document on maximum lorry weights. [17270]

Mr. Watts: Publication of the content of the responses, apart from those from people who have said they do not want their replies divulged, will be for consideration when a decision on the consultation is announced.

Driving Prohibitions (Scotoma)

Sir Michael Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce a driving test for people currently prohibited from driving due to the condition scotoma. [16664]

Mr. Bowis: A driving test would not be an accurate test of fitness to drive safely in those suffering from a scotoma: it could not reproduce the emergency situations where the effect of a scotoma could have serious road safety consequences. The present clinical test, approved by the Royal College of Ophthalmologist, provides an objective assessment of the visual fitness to drive safely. It also means that a uniform standard can be applied to all drivers.

British Rail

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many British Rail employees have *(a)* been made redundant and *(b)* had their employment terminated for reasons other than disciplinary reasons; and how much has been paid out in redundancy and other severance payments (i) in total and (ii) in York since the Railways Act 1993 came into force. [16641]

Mr. Watts: The information requested is set out in the table. It is available only for financial years:

	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97 (40 weeks)	Totals
BR employees redundant	6,322	3,568	1,405	11,295
Terminated for other reasons[1]	7,585	3,673	1,446	12,704
Redundancy and other severance payments (£000s)	141	92	30	263

[1] Includes those who retired, left due to ill-health, resigned, and deaths in service.

Separate details relating to British Rail employees based in York are not available.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the dates of privatisation of all the York-based British Rail businesses which have been sold or franchised since 18 June 1996, the number of employees in each business at the time of privatisation and the amount of money received or paid out by the Government to transfer the business into the private sector. [16619]

Mr. Watts: The following British Rail businesses, whose headquarters were based in York, have been sold or franchised since 18 June 1996.

Business sold/franchised	*Date of sale/franchise awarded*	*Number of employees at date of sale/franchise award*	*Money received/subsidy granted (£ million)*[1]
Regional Railways North East Franchise	7 February 1997	Approximately 3,000	Subsidy of 224.5 in year 1 declining to 145.6 in 2003/4

[1] Franchises are awarded as contracts to run passenger train services in return for the payment of support, where necessary, and may not generate receipts.

BREL (Asbestos-related Diseases)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many claims from former employees of the British Rail Engineering Ltd. York carriageworks for compensation for contracting an asbestos-related disease have been *(a)* settled and *(b)* submitted since 14 October 1996; what is the average amount of compensation per case paid to date in final settlements; which body will be responsible for considering other claims in the future; and what financial provision will be made by his Department to enable compensation to be paid. [16618]

Mr. Watts: Since 14 October 1996, there have been two claims settled and two claims submitted by former BREL York employees for compensation for contracting an asbestos-related disease. The average amount of compensation per case settled to date is £36,818.

A single, industry-owned, claims-handling agency, Railway Claims Ltd., has handled compensation matters for the railway industry since April 1994 and will consider future claims.

In accordance with a minute laid before the House on 7 June 1996, the Government will ensure that adequate funds will continue to be made available to meet any financial obligations arising from the British Railways Board's present or future liabilities, or liabilities arising out of past transactions, events and circumstances.

Criminal Offences (Railway Stations)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total number of notifiable *(a)* violence against the person, *(b)* sexual, *(c)* robbery, *(d)* property and *(e)* criminal damage offences committed (i) at railway stations, (ii) in the vicinity of railway stations, (iii) at London underground stations and (iv) in the vicinity of London underground stations in each of the past five years. [16878]

Mr. Watts: The first two tables show the number of notifiable offences recorded by the British transport police, in the categories requested, at railway stations, in England and Wales, and London underground stations during 1995 and 1996. The third table shows crime figures at railway stations in Scotland in the nearest equivalent categories. The force does not keep records of crimes within the vicinity of railway or London underground stations. Figures for previous years are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Railway stations (England and Wales)

	1995	1996
Violence against the person	1,795	1,827
Sexual offences	671	364
Robbery	1,626	1,750
Theft and handling stolen goods	32,994	30,511
Criminal damage	13,212	12,074

London underground stations

	1995	1996
Violence against the person	387	416
Sexual offences	268	224
Robbery	535	620
Theft and handling stolen goods	12,230	9,359
Criminal damage	1,436	1,351

Railway stations (Scotland)

	1995	1996
Crimes of violence (of which robbery)	199	182
Crimes of indecency	32	33
Crimes of dishonesty	3,224	2,673
Fire-raising, malicious mischief etc.	1,477	1,501

Supertram, Sheffield

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on current progress in respect of the supertram in Sheffield. [16960]

Mr. Watts: Privatisation of South Yorkshire supertram is a matter for South Yorkshire passenger transport executive, which I understand is continuing to make progress towards a sale. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Local Government, Housing and Regeneration announced the issuing of £20 million in supplementary credit approval on 14 February, *Official Report*, column *319*. I understand that South Yorkshire passenger

transport authority is in contact with officials of the Department of the Environment about the practicalities of issuing this credit approval, and other financial matters.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency set up by his Department since the start of April 1992. [16963]

Mr. Bowis: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17065]

Mr. Bowis: The equipment is as follows:

Non-information technology items

Theft, fraud and arson	*Number of items*	*Other causes*	*Number of items*	*Items at £5,000 or more*	
				Amount	*Details*
£31,265	80	£13,364	37	Nil	Nil

Information technology items

Theft, fraud and arson	*Number of items*	*Other causes*	*Number of items*	*Items at £5,000 or more*	
				Amount	*Details*
£54,999	43	Nil	Nil	1	Lap-top computer—stolen from office

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the possible contribution which the conversion of diesel and petrol engines to run on road fuel gases could make to achieving reductions in emissions of SO_2, PH_{10}, NO_2 and O_3. [17121]

Mr. Bowis: An assessment of the potential of road fuel gases to reduce pollutant emissions can be found in the "Alternative Road Transport Fuels—A Preliminary Life Cycle Study for the UK, Volumes 1 and 2". This was produced by the energy technology support unit on behalf of the Departments of Transport and of Trade and Industry and published by HMSO in 1996 (ISBN 0 11 515410-8/0 11 515411-6). Copies are available in the House Library. A further study quantifying the viability and benefits of vehicles running on alternative fuels compared with petrol and diesel will be published later this year.

A406–A13 Bridge

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *61*, what assessment he has made of the need for a bridge to carry the A406 over the A13 at Bedston to facilitate access to the millennium festival. [17042]

Mr. Bowis: None, but I understand that consultants working for Millennium Central Ltd. are undertaking some preliminary investigations.

Emergency Towing Vessels

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much of the English coast in each direction is covered by the emergency towing vessel stationed at Dover. [17302]

Mr. John Bowis: The emergency towing vessel based in the Dover strait covers an area which extends from Harwich in the north of the Thames estuary to the Greenwich meridian in the English channel.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated time which the emergency towing vessel stationed at Falmouth is expected to take to travel to the north Devon coast. [17301]

Mr. Bowis: The emergency towing vessel is not stationed at Falmouth, but spends nearly all of its time at sea, patrolling as far west as the Portland bill and as far north as Pembroke.

Road Markings and Signposting

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve road markings and signposting; and if he will make a statement. [17363]

Mr. Watts: The placing and maintenance of road signs and markings is the responsibility of the traffic authority—in England, the local traffic authority for local roads, and the Highways Agency on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport for trunk roads and motorways. The signs and markings used are required to conform with regulations, principally the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1994, made jointly by the Secretaries of State for Transport, for Scotland and for Wales, or to be specially authorised by the Secretary of State. My Department is currently preparing a statutory instrument to amend the TSRGD to include new sign designs in response to changing traffic management needs and techniques. Work is also in hand to update the joint guidance published by the three Departments on the correct design and use of signs.

Motorways

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many kilometres of motorway are currently *(a)* open,

(b) under construction and *(c)* planned in England (i) as new motorway and (ii) as existing motorway being widened. [17266]

Mr. Watts: The figures for trunk road are as follows:

Motorways currently

(a) open: 2,725 km

(b) under construction: 108 km

(c) planned in England

(i) as new motorway: 67 km

(ii) as existing motorway being widened: 313 km

In addition, there are about 50 kms of non trunk motorways.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the minimum age requirements enforced by his Department. [15914]

Mr. Hanley: The only minimum age requirement enforced by this Department is the minimum age for the secret intelligence services, which is 21 years.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when *(a)* the British high commissioner and *(b)* his officials last visited the Jaffna area of Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement., [16935]

Dr. Liam Fox: Our high commissioner last visited Jaffna on 31 October 1996. Officials from the high commission, including the deputy high commissioner, visited on 28–29 January this year.

Colombia

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the activities of the BP company in Colombia; and if he will make a statement. [16661]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have received three letters from human rights organisations and members of the public about the activities of BP in Colombia. Two questions have been tabled in the European Parliament. No reliable evidence has been put forward to substantiate the allegations made against BP.

Rio Summit

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Ministers attended the Rio summit in 1992. [16825]

Dr. Liam Fox: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department, then Secretary of State for the Environment, my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State for Overseas Development and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Department, then Minister of State for Environmental Protection, attended the Rio summit in 1992.

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17070]

Mr. Hanley: The following items of equipment have been reported stolen or unaccounted for in the past 12 months:

1996–97

	£
Stolen	
20 general items	2,576
5 IT items (laptop PC, printers and modem)	3,995
Unaccounted for	
1 item (answerphone)	35
Total	6,606

Indonesia

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations and what reports he has received about the recent incidents in West Kalimantan in which Indonesian soldiers are reported to have killed a number of Dayak people; and if he will make a statement. [17043]

Mr. Hanley: We have received reports from the British embassy in Jakarta and other sources about the recent clashes between Dayak and Madurese communities in West Kalimantan, but we do not have full details of the incidents or of the number of casualties sustained. We have received a number of expressions of concern about these events. We are monitoring the situation.

Albania

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which political parties and political organisations in Albania have received assistance from the Westminster Foundation. [17200]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 19 February, *Official Report*, column *580*.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department estimates that it cost to establish each executive agency set up by his Department since the start of April 1992. [16974]

Mr. Hanley: We have not established any executive agencies since April 1992.

European Ideal (Promotion Costs)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been

spent in Britain in each year since 1992 by *(a)* the European information office and *(b)* the European Commission office in London on promotion of the European ideal. [17052]

Mr. David Davis: There is no European information office in the UK. Expenditure by the European Commission's representation in the UK is intended to explain the meaning and purpose of policies decided by the EU Council of Ministers, for instance the single market.

Ceuta and Melilla

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Spanish Foreign Minister about the status of Ceuta and Melilla. [17109]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has regular discussions with his Spanish counterpart on matters of mutual concern. Ceuta and Melilla have not been discussed recently.

Latin America

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role he has in the co-ordination of Government policy towards Latin America. [15520]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary is responsible for the co-ordination of the foreign policy aspects of the United Kingdom's relations with Latin America.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role he has in co-ordinating Her Majesty's Government's follow-up to the links into Latin America conference on 10 February. [15534]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary is responsible for this Department's role in taking forward the interest generated by the conference both in the UK and in Latin America. In his closing speech at the conference he made clear our commitment to forging a new alliance with Latin America. Officials are already working with the Department of Trade and Industry to develop and implement a follow-up strategy to this end.

UNESCO

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had on the extent of reform at UNESCO. [15551]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: None. The UK observer to UNESCO continues to monitor closely the extent of reform in the organisation.

Qatar

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the dates; and names of Ministers, and the names and function of officials who have visited Qatar in the last three years. [16919]

Mr. Hanley: I visited Qatar on 16–17 October 1996. Other Ministers who have made visits to Qatar in the last three years are:

1994

29–30 May: My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

1995

20–21 March: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, then Minister of State for Defence Procurement.

9–11 September: My hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement.

1996

17–20 May: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Energy

14–15 June: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement.

27–28 October: My right hon., Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

17 November: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

1997

14–16 February: My hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement.

There have been numerous contacts and visits by officials to Qatar over this period. We have an embassy in Doha, and that naturally necessitates many official movements.

European Parliament (Costs)

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will assess the United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament share of the European Parliament's costs relative to the costs of the House of Commons in the latest year for which figures are available. [16981]

Mr. David Davis: The total budgeted cost of the European Parliament in 1997 is 887.2 million ecu or £657.9 million.

The UK's contribution to the 1996 EU budget represented 13.6 per cent. of the total.

UK Members of the European Parliament make up 87 out of a total of 626 MEPs.

The estimated total cost of the House of Commons in 1996–97 is £236.4 million.

Exact comparisons are difficult since both functions and basis of costings are different.

Mohammed Sagheer

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects a decision to be taken on the application, reference B9995, made by Mohammed Sagheer to the post in Islamabad to join his wife in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [17398]

Dr. Liam Fox: I have asked the high commission at Islamabad for details and will arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from me as soon as possible.

Morwenstowe Interception Station

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what classification and status the Morwenstowe interception station at Bude, in Cornwall, has been given; at what cost it was built; who paid for it; who owns the radomes and equipment; who owns the land; what flags it flies; how many personnel work there, and from which organisations; and if he will identify the name, nationality and employer of its base commander. [17421]

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 5 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *418*. The land on which Morwenstowe is situated is owned by Her Majesty's Government.

Millennium Club

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times in the last three years, he has addressed the Millennium club in his official capacity; and if he will list the names of those present and the companies they represented on each occasion; and if he will make a statement. [15694]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* None in his official capacity.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Small Businesses

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to improve the competitiveness of small businesses. [15519]

Mr. Page: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government recognise the vital contribution made to the economy by small businesses and are working hard to improve competitiveness by creating a favourable economic climate, reducing administrative and regulatory burdens on business and providing direct assistance where required.

Of crucial importance to improving the competitiveness of smaller businesses is the network of business links. Each outlet provides a single point of access to a wide range of high-quality integrated business support services.

Another important measure to help improve competitiveness has been to simplify the range of business support offered by the Government. This includes the introduction of two challenge funds; one to provide support on a sector basis and one to help address problems at a local level. The DTI as part of the simplification process has announced a radical shake-up of its schemes reducing the total number from 140 to around 25.

There is regular contact between the Department and the small firms representative organisations in order to take into account the views and concerns of small businesses. An example is the recent "Your Business Matters" consultation.

We have established a small business ministers' group with representation across 17 Whitehall Departments. The group is playing a key role in promoting small firms competitiveness throughout all areas of Government policy.

Century Date Change (Computers)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice and assistance is available through training and education councils to businesses in respect of the millennium compliance of computer systems; and if he will make a statement. [15824]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department has sent information packs on the century date change problem to all business links in England—in which training and enterprise councils are partners—and their counterparts in Scotland and Wales. The pack includes a description of the problem, frequently asked questions and guidance on what businesses should do to address the problem. The business links were also invited to respond if they required further assistance in disseminating the information. In February 1997, a senior official from the communications and information industries directorate was seconded to the Confederation of British Industry, the Computer Software Science Association, DTI-led Taskforce 2000 with the specific responsibility of supporting the business links in this awareness and information dissemination activity.

Overseas Investment

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the percentage of the total direct investment overseas made by United Kingdom companies in *(a)* other European Union countries and *(b)* the United States of America in each year from 1984 to date. [17146]

Mr. Nelson: Following is the information:

Flows of UK outward direct investment to EU, USA and rest of the world (RoW): 1984–95 (percent of total)

	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
EU	0	29	19	12	27	28	50	42	46	36	43	37
USA	48	37	64	66	50	54	1	24	13	44	25	40
RoW	52	34	17	22	23	18	49	34	41	20	32	23

Source:
Business Monitor: MA4.

Private Shareholders

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the number of private shareholders in *(a)* Northern Electric and *(b)* Northumbrian Water Group at (i) the date the privatisation share offers were taken up and (ii) currently. [16920]

Mr. Page: This is a matter for the companies concerned.

Helms-Burton Amendment

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on EU discussions with the US on the Helms-Burton amendment. [16999]

Mr. Nelson: Sir Leon Brittan and Commission staff have held, and will continue to hold, discussions with the US Administration with a view to securing suspension or repeal of the Helms-Burton legislation. This objective is fully shared by the British Government. Meanwhile, the World Trade Organisation has established a panel to investigate the EU claim that the Helms-Burton provisions are in breach of US obligations in the WTO.

Electricity Cables

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what requirements have been placed upon the electricity distribution companies to bury power lines currently carried overhead on pylons. [15789]

Mr. Page: No requirements have been placed.

Research

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the names and locations of each of the overseas-based companies which have established research and development operations in the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years. [17365]

Mr. Greg Knight: Research and development investments notified to my Department's Invest In Britain Bureau during the period are as follows:

Inward investment R and D projects (1985–1996)

Year	*Company name*	*Region*
1985	Speciality Cable	South East
1985	Digital Equipment	South East
1985	Ford Motor Company	South East
1985	Genetic Int.	South East
1985	Data General	South East
1985	Honda UK	South West
1985	Systime	Yorkshire and Humberside
1986	Ceramic Development	East Midlands
1986	Pye TMC Ltd.	Scotland
1986	Avantek	South East
1986	IN Energy Services	Wales
1986	Texaco Ltd.	Wales
1986	Pilkington Reinforcements	Wales
1986	Sepehrtech	West Midlands
1986	Telemecanique Electrique	West Midlands
1986	IBM UK Ltd.	West Midlands
1986	Buehler UK	West Midlands
1986	Brain Power Ltd.	West Midlands
1986	Digital Equipment Company	West Midlands
1987	Siemens plc	North West
1987	BBN Labs.	Scotland
1987	Bell Northern	South East
1987	McDonnell Douglas	South East
1987	SRI Int.	South East
1987	Ensinger Ltd.	Wales
1987	Calgary Pain Treatment	Wales
1987	Aqua Norse	Wales
1987	Amercoeur Energy	Wales
1987	Lynchgate Associates	Wales
1987	Lynchgate Associates	Wales
1987	Ontario Corporation	Wales
1987	Van Leer Vacuum	Wales
1987	Texaco (UK)	Wales
1988	Roberts Labs.	South East
1988	University of Michigan	South East
1988	Convatec Inste Biology	Wales
1989	Northumbria Biologicals	London
1989	Steriseal and Nomeq	West Midlands
1989	Istel Ltd.	West Midlands
1989	HS Systems UK	West Midlands
1990	Nissan UK	London
1990	Nissan	London
1990	Kobe Steel	South East
1990	Sandoz Products	South East
1990	Fairford Animation	South West
1990	Bakelite Polymers	West Midlands
1991	Rank Xerox	Eastern
1991	Nissan Europe	Eastern
1991	NSK/RHP European Research	East Midlands
1991	Komatsu	London
1991	GPT Ltd.	London
1991	Softlab	North West
1992	Rhone-Poulanc Roper	South East
1992	Southern Glasshouse	South East
1992	Zeon Chemicals	Wales
1993	Group Lotus	Eastern
1993	Alkeremese Europe	Eastern
1993	Dante Ltd.	Eastern
1993	Nortalc Milling	London
1993	Petrolite Ltd.	North West
1993	Clintrials Ltd.	South East
1993	Calsonic Int. Europe	Wales
1993	SP Tyres	West Midlands
1993	Cable Data Int.	Yorkshire and Humberside
1993	Plant Science Ltd.	Yorkshire and Humberside
1994	Cybereye	London
1994	Shell Research	North West
1994	Xilinx Development	Scotland
1994	Rand Information	South East
1994	Daewoo	South East
1994	Warwick Chemicals	Wales
1994	Mascotech	West Midlands
1994	Compower Ltd.	West Midlands
1994	Cross Products UK	Yorkshire and Humberside
1995	Hewlett Packard	Eastern
1995	Knoll Pharmaceuticals	East Midlands
1995	Fisons	East Midlands
1995	Astra Charnwood	East Midlands
1995	Microvoice Apps.	London
1995	Gallup Organisation	London
1995	Datek	London
1995	Pico (UK)	London
1995	Harris Labs.	Northern Ireland
1995	Sharp Labs.	South East
1995	IBM Labs.	South East
1995	Daewoo—Worthing	South East
1995	Invertron Simulated Systems	South East
1995	Daewoo UK Ltd.	South East
1995	4 Front Grp.	South East
1995	Ericsson Ltd.	South East
1995	Rover Grp.	West Midlands
1995	Fluent Europe	Yorkshire and Humberside
1995	SCO	Yorkshire and Humberside

Source:
IBB Database.

Inward Investment

Mr. Brian David Jenkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the 10 largest industrial or commercial developments in *(a)* England and *(b)* the west midlands which resulted from inward investment since

1992; and in each case what estimate he has made of the number of jobs created and the average cost to public funds of each of these jobs. [17193]

Mr. Greg Knight: According to figures notified to my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau and the Government office for the west midlands the 10 largest publicly quotable industrial or commercial development in *(a)* England and *(b)* the west midlands are as follows:

Top ten investments in England by new jobs

Year	*Company*	*Country*	*Number of new jobs*	*Region*
1994	Samsung	Korea	3,200	North East
1994	Honda	Japan	2,000	South West
1995	Siemens	Germany	1,800	North East
1996	QVC	US	1,616	North West
1995	Jaguar	US	1,210	West Midlands
1995	Toyota	Japan	1,000	East Midlands
1995	Nortel	Canada	916	South West
1993	MBNA	US	822	North West
1997	Nissan	Japan	800	North East
1995	Epson	Japan	800	West Midlands

Top ten inward investments into the West Midlands by new jobs.

Year	*Company*	*Country*	*Number of new jobs*
1995	Jaguar	US	1,210
1995	Epson	Japan	800
1992	Heller Machine Tools	Germany	508
1997	Calvins Barbeque UK	US	500
1995	Makita Manufacturing	Japan	500
1994	Sun Valley Poultry Ltd.	US	450
1995	Cable Midlands	US	400
1995	Callow and Maddox	US	255
1995	SP Tyres (UK) Ltd.	Japan	250
1997	Edscha	Germany	200

Inward investment includes takeovers, expansions and joint ventures as well as new greenfield projects. Information on the average cost to public funds for each new job in these tables is not held centrally and could be given only at a disproportionate cost. Not all of the projects in these tables were eligible for such assistance.

Albania

Mr MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions his Department has had with *(a)* the Albanian commercial office, *(b)* VEFA Holdings and *(c)* Anglo-Adriatic Holdings in the last five years. [16401]

Mr. Nelson: Officials from this Department had discussions on a number of occasions with the Albanian commercial office on matters relating to furthering trade and investment opportunities for UK companies in Albania. However, the Department had no contact with the Albanian commercial office in 1996 and I understand that it may have ceased operating early that year.

The Department has had no discussion with either VEFA Holdings or Anglo-Adriatic Holdings in the last five years.

Single Market Compliance Unit

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cases are currently being pursued by his Department's single market compliance unit. [17110]

Mr. Nelson: The single market compliance unit was relaunched as Action Single Market on 28 March 1996, incorporating the Department of Trade and Industry's European state aids complaints work into the more general single market trade barriers work carried out by the SMCU. Action Single Market is currently pursuing 70 complaints against other single market countries, including eight state aids cases.

Breakfast Tours

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the cost to date to public funds of his breakfast tours; what are the projected future costs; and if he will indicate the dates and locations of each event and the ministers involved. [16913]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* The 15 events held to date are estimated to cost approximately £78,000. The dates and locations of these events and the Ministers involved are given in the table. The future costs of the programme will depend on the number of events and the attendance.

Dates	*Ministers*	*Location*
11 November 1996	Mr. Lang, Mr. Page	Luton
11 November 1996	Mr. Knight	Lincoln
18 November 1996	Mr. Lang, Mr. Curry, Mr. Kirkhope	Leeds
18 November 1996	Sir George Young, Mr. Ian Taylor	Southampton
2 December 1996	Mr. Knight, Mr. Jack	Norwich
9 December 1996	Mr. Curry, Mr. Paice	Ipswich
9 December 1996	Mr. Jack, Mr. John Taylor	Birkenhead
16 December 1996	Sir George Young, Mr. John Taylor	Leicester
16 December 1996	Mr. Waldegrave, Dr. Fox	Bath
20 January 1997	Mr. Waldegrave, Mr. Streeter	Exeter
27 January 1997	Mr. Forth, Mr. Ian Taylor	Crawley
3 February 1997	Mr. Alistair Burt, Mr. John Taylor	Bolton
3 February 1997	Mr. Waldegrave, Mr. Ian Taylor	Ashford
17 February 1997	Mr. Knight, Mr. Kirkhope	Grantham
17 February 1997	Mr. Lang, Mr. Page	Birmingham

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Ecclesiastical Heritage

35. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on the Church Commissioners' role in the Church of England's submission to Her Majesty's Government in regard to the ecclesiastical heritage. [15557]

Mr Alison: The Church Commissioners were fully involved with and support the Church of England's submission to Her Majesty's Government in respect of the ecclesiastical heritage.

Bishops' Cars

38. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how many bishops *(a)* are and *(b)* are not provided with a car and chauffeur; at what annual cost; and if he will make a statement. [15560]

Mr. Alison: At 31 December last, 104 bishops were provided with cars. Thirty-one bishops employ chauffeurs, of whom 10 are part-time or combine the post with other duties. Nine bishops use their own cars and are paid a mileage allowance. The net cost of car purchase in 1995 was £378,000. The cost of chauffeurs' salaries in 1995 was £334,000. From 1997, new cars will be acquired under a leasing arrangement which is expected to produce significant savings.

Clergy Pensions

39. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment the Commissioners have made of the difference in the value of clergy pensions under the new pension scheme and its predecessor. [15561]

Mr. Alison: The current pension scheme provides a full service pension—payable on retirement at or after age 65 years with 37 or more years of pensionable service—of two thirds the previous year's national minimum stipend. The resulting figure is thus £8,533 per annum in 1996–97. Under the new future service pension fund which is to take effect—subject to parliamentary approval—from 1 January 1998, there will be no change to the bases of calculating benefits. Post-retirement increases will, however, be documented by reference to limited price indexation. This will provide a stronger guarantee for scheme members than the present legislation, under which all increases in the levels of benefits are at the discretion of the Commissioners. The past service scheme regulations will be amended to bring them into line. The object under both schemes will, however, continue to be to maintain post-retirement increases in pensions in line with stipend increases.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr Martyn Jones: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment he had made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings the Commissioners occupy; and if he will make a statement. [16316]

Mr. Alison: The Commissioners comply in full with the requirements of COSHH—Control of Substances Hazardous to Health—legislation that is designed to ensure that no hazardous materials or dangerous substances are present in places of work. All new equipment purchased is free from chlorofluorocarbons. The cleaning contractors employed by the Commissioners purchase on a preferential basis materials from those companies manufacturing and packaging products which have no deleterious effect on the atmosphere.

Bishops (Expenses)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what is the procedure for approving and monitoring bishops' *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue expenses. [10951]

Mr. Alison: The Commissioners' spending on episcopal housing and expenses—both capital and revenue—is subject to close budgetary control. Budgets follow detailed consultation each year with the bishops and, in the case of episcopal housing, with See house surveyors-architects. The See house budgets are the minimum the Commissioners feel is consistent with the proper maintenance of those properties. Working expenses budgets aim to enable the bishops effectively to perform their duties. After initial consideration by the Bishoprics Committee the budgets are recommended to both the General Purposes Committee and the Board of Governors for approval.

Expenditure is closely monitored, including a quarterly audit of those official expenses met directly by the bishops themselves. The Bishoprics Committee receives quarterly reports outlining the capital and revenue position and separate reports on items of major expenditure.

Clergy Salaries

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what has been the Church Commissioners' expenditure on clergy salaries in each year since 1986. [10950]

Mr. Alison: In each year since 1986, the Commissioners' expenditure on clergy stipends has been as follows:

£ million

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*[1]
Payments and allocations to stipends	35.5	38.1	41.6	47.0	58.9	62.5	59.8	58.0	54.1	41.7	32.6

[1] The 1996 figure is an estimate based on unaudited outturn figures.

HEALTH

Orthodontists

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many orthodontists there are in each health authority in England. [14241]

Mr. Malone: There is no strict definition of an orthodontist. Information is available on the number of general dental principals who submitted at least 100 orthodontics appliance claims in a one-year period. The latest published data is for 1994–95 and is given by Family Health Services Authority. This information has been placed in the Library.

Dental Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answers of 14 January, *Official Report*, column *220*, and 20 January, *Official Report*, column *490*, and to his oral statement of 5 February,

Official Report, column 1030, what factors determined whether his Department was able to disclose the whereabouts, by county or postal district, of the dental practices. [15189]

Mr. Malone: Details of individuals are withheld when their release could lead to an unwarranted invasion of privacy by identification of that individual. To release such information would be in breach of the open government code of conduct. The decision to release information, for example about location of practices, relies on a judgment about whether the totality of information which would then be available about the individual would make identification likely.

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the minimum age requirements enforced by his Department. [15915]

Mr. Horam: This Department sets out the following age requirements in primary legislation:

under the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, section 18, children may not in general be employed under the age of 13. Restrictions also apply to hours worked by children up to the minimum school leaving age. Street trading under the age of 16 is also prohibited under section 20 of the Act as amended, but children of 14 or over can be employed by their parents. These requirements are enforced by local authorities; and

an application for a licence to set up a nurses agency may be refused by a local authority under section 2(3)(a) of the Nurses Agencies Act 1957 if the applicant, or licence holder, is under 21.

NHS Funding (North-West)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much money was spent on the NHS in the north-west in 1979; [16146]

(2) how much money has been spent on the NHS in the north-west for each year since 1992. [16145]

Mr. Horam: Figures for 1979 are not available. The table gives details from 1992–93 to 1995–96.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Total revenue expenditure (£ million)	3,592	3,785	[1]4,149	4,388

[1] Includes Cumbria FHSA.

Tropical Diseases

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department has spent during each of the last five years on provision of travel vaccinations. [16266]

Mr. Horam: Information is not collected in the form requested. The net ingredient costs in England for vaccines which may be given for the purposes of travel are given in the table. Some of the vaccines in this group will have been prescribed for reasons other than travel. The costs do not include dispensing costs. Information on the costs of administration of these vaccines by general practitioners is not held centrally.

The net ingredient cost for vaccines administered for travel[1]*: 1991–1995*

England

Year	*Total cost (£ million)*
1991	7.3
1992	16.5
1993	29.1
1994	40.5
1995	47.0

[1] The travel vaccines are those preparations in the British National Formulary Issue 28, September 1994, section 14.6—International travel: BCG, cholera, diphtheria, hepatitis A, meningococcal A and C, normal immunoglobulin, poliomyelitis, typhoid, typhoid-paratyphoid A and B and yellow fever. Some of these vaccines will have been prescribed for reasons other than travel.

Notes

1. The data cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered in England.

2. The net ingredient costs refers to the cost of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the impact of introducing charges for travel vaccines on *(a)* the number of cases of travellers returning to the UK infected with disease and *(b)* the number of people receiving vaccinations before travelling abroad. [16268]

Mr. Horam: People do not have to pay for all travel vaccines and this policy has not changed. Travellers have always had to pay a prescription charge or the full cost for some vaccines. Free advice on appropriate measures to protect health when travelling abroad, including advice on immunisation and malaria prophylaxis, is available under the national health service.

The Department of Health keeps under review all available information on imported infectious diseases and the risk to travellers and this is taken into account in formulating policy on travel vaccines.

Private Patients

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many private patients as *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* day cases in NHS pay beds received treatment in each specialty in 1995–96; and how many have received such treatment so far in 1996–97. [16646]

Mr. Horam: Information for 1995–96 and 1996–97 is not yet available.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many admissions to NHS hospitals in England there were of patients from *(a)* non-NHS hospitals, *(b)* private nursing homes and *(c)* private health care or residential institutions in each year from 1985–86 to 1995–96. [16649]

Mr. Horam: The information that is available relates to the years 1989–90 to 1994–95 and is for the total number of admissions to national health service hospitals in England from non-NHS hospitals, private nursing homes, private health care or private residential institutions.

Year	*Number of admissions to NHS hospitals in England from other non-NHS hospitals, nursing homes, health care or residential institutions*
1989–90	41,192
1990–91	39,766
1991–92	36,535
1992–93	32,225
1993–94	30,612
1994–95	24,124

Note:
Data is grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.
Source:
Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many private patients in NHS pay beds underwent surgery or day surgery *(a)* in total and *(b)* under each chapter of the OPCS operation short list in 1995–96. [16660]

Mr. Horam: Information for 1995–96 is not yet available.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many out-patient consultations with private patients were held in NHS hospitals *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each surgical and non-surgical specialty in 1990–91 and each subsequent year. [16615]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is contained in the statistical publication. "Outpatients and ward attenders, England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Attention Deficit Disorder

Mr. Wigley: to ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the relationship between attention deficit disorder and learning difficulties; and if he will make a statement. [16622]

Mr. Burns: There is no specific research being undertaken into the relationship between attention deficit disorder and learning difficulties but research on learning difficulties is included in the current National Health Service research and development programme.

National Health Service Executive

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the annual budget for the NHS Executive in 1997–98; and how many people he estimates it will employ in that year. [16645]

Mr. Horam: The National Health Service Executive's provisional annual budget for 1997–98 is £107.5 million. This is £9.5 million less than in 1996–97. Precise staffing figures will emerge as part of the detailed business planning round for 1997–98, which is now under way.

Breast Implants

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many breast implants have been carried out in each year since 1985 on the national health service; and how many have leaked. [16902]

Mr. Horam: The available data on the number of primary operations carried out in national health service hospitals covering the years 1989–90 to 1994–95 are shown in the table. Information on the number of implants that have leaked is not available centrally.

Year	*Total*
1989–90	3,080
1990–91	3,342
1991–92	4,300
1992–93	5,360
1993–94	4,781
1994–95	5,478

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics, Operation Code B30 and B31.

Children (Policy Co-ordination)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the co-ordination of Government policies relating to children. [15529]

Mr. Burns: There are many mechanisms—formal and informal—already in place to facilitate co-ordination between Government Departments on policies for children. We believe these work well, especially as they have been recently expanded by the forming of the children services strategy group which was established by the Department.

Ashworth Hospital

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the date of the report which was made by the suspended chief executive of Ashworth hospital into her investigation of the allegations made by Stephen Daggett; when it was sent to the chair and chief executive of the High Security Psychiatric Services Commissioning Board; and what action was taken on that report. [16923]

Mr. Burns: The chief executive of Ashworth hospital wrote to the chief executive of the High Security Psychiatric Services Commissioning Board on 5 February 1997.

The action taken subsequently is covered in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's statement to the House of 10 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns 21–30.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the grounds for the suspension of the chief executive of Ashworth hospital; and what ministerial involvement there was in the decision. [16924]

Mr. Burns: The decision to suspend the chief executive of Ashworth hospital by the chairman of Ashworth Hospital Authority followed serious allegations concerning the personality disorder unit at Ashworth hospital.

Accident and Emergency Units (Assaults)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many assaults on nurses in accident and emergency departments have been reported in each year since 1992. [16927]

Mr. Horam: This information is not collected centrally.

Waiting Times

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many health authorities have extended maximum waiting times from 12 to 18 months; [16926]

(2) how many people admitted to hospital as emergencies during 1995 and 1996 were already on hospital waiting lists for elective treatments. [16928]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Strokes

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the incidence of stroke and the priority which his Department attaches to addressing this condition. [17094]

Mr. Horam: The Government are clearly committed to reducing the incidence of stroke and stroke mortality. "The Health of the Nation" strategy includes specific targets to reduce deaths from stroke by 40 per cent. by the year 2000. Since the strategy was launched in 1992, death rates have fallen by 14.3 per cent. in the 65 to 74s and by 8.5 per cent. in the under-65s. Data on the precise incidence of stroke is not collected centrally.

Efforts to achieve the targets are supported by a number of high profile campaigns, for example, promoting physical activity, sensible drinking and encouraging people to stop smoking. The National Health Service Executive has also produced recommendations on the provision of rehabilitation services for stroke patients which have been distributed to all local health authorities. Copies of this document, "Effective Health Care—Stroke Rehabilitation", March 1992, have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received concerning measures to improve the prevention, treatment and care of stroke; and if he will make a statement. [17092]

Mr. Horam: We received a copy of "Stroke: National Tragedy, National Priority—An Agenda for action in stroke prevention, treatment and care" produced by the Stroke Association when I spoke at the launch of the document on 13 Februagy. We are sure that local health authorities will find the document useful when discussing the commissioning of health services for their areas for people who have had a stroke.

Physical inactivity is a major cause of ill health, including stroke. In particular, physically inactive people have up to three times the risk of stroke than active people. The Government are addressing this concern through a major three-year physical activity campaign called "Active for Life". The campaign, which is administered by the Health Education Authority at a total cost of £9 million, informs people of the significance of maintaining 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on at least five times a week as a means of reducing the risk of stroke.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), gave to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 17 February 1997, *Official Report*, column *381* about the treatment and care of people who have had a stroke.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is Department is *(a)* currently funding and *(b)* evaluating into the effect on the incidence of stroke of salt levels in bread and other common foodstuffs; and if he will make a statement. [17093]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health has not commissioned and is not evaluating research into the effect on the incidence of stroke of salt levels in bread and other common foodstuffs.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked the Chief Medical Officer to discuss with the faculty of public health medicine the possibility of convening a seminar to assess the evidence of linkage between sodium, blood pressure and stroke and to identify feasible research to clarify inconsistencies in the existing evidence.

Antibiotics (Subscribing)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics he has collated on changes in the average aggregate prescribing of antibiotics in each of the past five years. [16997]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table.

Number of prescription items dispensed for antibiotics and annual percentage change, 1991 to 1995

England

Year	*Prescription items (millions)*	*Annual percentage change*
1991	43.7	—
1992	43.4	–1
1993	47.7	10
1994	45.8	–4
1995	49.4	8

Notes:

1. Antibiotics are those preparations in the British National Formulary, issue 28, September 1994, therapeutic group 5.1—antibacterial drugs.

2. The data cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered in England.

Overdoses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of overdoses of over-the-counter drugs which have occurred in those aged *(a)* under 16 years and *(b)* over 16 years in each of the last five years; how many and what percentage resulted in death; and if he will make a statement. [17151]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not held centrally.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of *(a)* sporadic, *(b)* iatrogenic, *(c)* familial, *(d)* Gerst-Straussler syndrome and *(e)* new variant CJD have been recorded in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [17152]

Mr. Horam: Updated figures of deaths in definite and probably cases of all types of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease are published monthly by the Department of Health.

Copies of the latest press release dated 3 February 1997 have been placed in the Library.

Since the figures were published, a further case of nvCJD has been diagnosed in a patient who is still alive.

Stress-related Illness

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's estimate of the number of working days lost in the health service as a result of stress-related illness in each of the past 10 years. [17469]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Influenza Vaccinations

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations he has had with the medical profession in relation to the inclusion in the contract for general practitioners of the vaccination of specified target groups against influenza. [17447]

Mr. Horam: We have had no recent representations from the medical profession on this issue. General practitioners already immunise at risk groups against influenza as part of the general medical services.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what pilot projects he has instituted into the efficacy of mass influenza vaccination of target groups in terms of reduced incidence of *(a)* influenza and *(b)* complications arising from influenza; [17445]

(2) if he will give figures for the use of influenza vaccine in each of the past five years; what guidelines he has issued in relation to the specifying of target groups for influenza vaccinations; what assessment he has made of the adequacy of these targets; and if he will make a statement. [17446]

Mr. Horam: The number of doses of influenza vaccine supplied to general practitioners and health authorities in England and Wales are as follows:

Year	*Doses*
1992–93	4,678,000
1993–94	5,692,000
1994–95	6,114,000
1995–96	5,964,000
1996–97	[1]6,226,000

[1] Provisional.

Broadly, influenza immunisation is recommended for people with underlying diseases which put them at risk of serious illness should they develop influenza. This includes people with chronic respiratory disease such as chronic bronchitis and asthma, chronic heart disease, kidney failure, diabetes and diseases or treatment which suppress the immune system. Immunisation is also recommended for all people in long-term residential care, where influenza can spread very rapidly and cause great disruption.

Every year the Chief Medical Officer issues guidance to doctors about influenza. This includes information about the expected strain, the vaccine available and which patients should be given the vaccine. Further information is available in the memorandum, "Immunisation against Infectious Disease". The Department of Health has produced a leaflet for patients about immunisation against influenza which was made available through doctors' surgeries and post offices.

The joint committee on vaccination and immunisation keeps its recommendations for influenza immunisation policy under review. Several recent studies, some funded by the Department of Health, have demonstrated the efficacy of influenza vaccine in reducing influenza and its complications in the target groups.

Hospital Payphones (Charges)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will instruct NHS hospital trusts that normal BT call-box charges should apply to all payphones within hospitals. [17395]

Mr. Horam: This is a matter for local management.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner fundholders there were in each health authority in England in each of the past five years. [17463]

Mr. Malone: For current year information on the number of fundholding general practitioners in each health authority, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on 17 February 1997 at columns *378–80*. The corresponding figures for previous years will be placed in the Library shortly.

Gastroschisis

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the possible link between incidences of gastroschisis and pollution and other environmental factors. [17277]

Mr. Horam: None.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Rwanda

32. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evaluation has been made by Her Majesty's Government of the joint aid agencies report, "Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda"; and what subsequent change of policy has been *(a)* evaluated and *(b)* decided arising from that report. [15553]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have reviewed the findings of the Rwanda evaluation and are pursuing lessons learnt in consultation with other aid donors, for many of the recommendations require wider discussion and broad consensus. We have also initiated a review of our own humanitarian aid policy particularly in relation to multilateral agencies, in order to seek improvements in international systems for the delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance.

Overseas Aid Budget (United Nations Target)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the overseas aid budget and the UN target for development expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product. [15548]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have received a number of representations from hon. Members and others concerning the development assistance budget, many of which have referred to the UN 0.7 per cent. ODA-GNP target.

Iraq

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding assistance for children in Iraq. [15554]

Dr. Liam Fox: After considering various representations and proposals, ODA spent £1.7 million in 1996 on activities which directly benefited children in Iraq. ODA is ready to provide further funding in 1997. To alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people caused by Saddam Hussein the UN adopted Security Council resolution 986—which the United Kingdom co-sponsored—in April 1995; we are pleased it is now being implemented after long delays by Saddam Hussein.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what advice was given to the Minister by his officials and officials from other Departments, before the approval of the national police training project in Indonesia; and if he will place a copy of the documentary record of such advice in the Library; [17227]

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of the documents referred to in *(a)* paragraph 40, on the benefits of the aid project and *(b)* appendix 3, paragraph 3.4 on seeking further Indonesian purchasers of United Kingdom defence equipment, of the NAO report, Aid to Indonesia, (HC101 of Session 1996–97). [17228]

Dr. Liam Fox: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mrs. Clywd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what procedures were followed in order to obtain ministerial approval for the national police training project in Indonesia; on what date the project was approved by the Minister; which Minister approved the project; what meetings took place between the Minister and his officials, and officials from other Departments in relation to the approval of the project; who attended those meetings; and if he will place copies of *(a)* the minutes and *(b)* other documentary records of the meetings in the Library. [17145]

Dr. Fox: As stated in paragraph 39 of the National Audit Office report, "Aid to Indonesia" (HC 101 of Session 1996–97), the national police management training project in Indonesia was approved by the head of eastern Asia department of the Overseas Development Administration. In September 1982 the right hon. Sir Neil Marten, the then Minister for Overseas Development, approved the project in principle. This was on the basis of a submission by the head of EAD. No meetings took place between the Minister and officials to discuss the project.

I will write to the hon. Member about the release of this document.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Beef Imports (Irish Republic)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of beef imported from the Irish Republic is derived from cattle under 30 months of age. [14771]

Mrs. Browning: Statistics on imports of beef are not collected by age of cattle. It is not therefore possible to provide the information requested.

However, the Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) Regulations 1996 prohibit the sale for human consumption of all meat derived from bovines which, at the time of slaughter, were more than 30 months old. This measure applied to bovines slaughtered on or after 29 March 1996, whether in the UK or overseas, other than those born, reared and slaughtered in those third countries specifically excluded by the regulations and listed in the schedule to the regulations. This list of countries is confined to those where the Government are satisfied that we can import beef without risk. It does not include the Republic of Ireland.

Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many *(a)* sheep, *(b)* calves and *(c)* pigs were exported from the United Kingdom in each month of 1996 for (i) slaughter, (ii) further fattening and (iii) breeding; [13543]

(2) how many piglets of less than 12 weeks of age were exported for production or breeding during 1996; [14605]

(3) how many pigs were exported for slaughter during 1996. [14606]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* This information can be provided in the detail requested only at disproportionate cost. Figures for exports of sheep

and cattle are given in the table. The information was gathered from internal Ministry sources. Most of the animals were exported for slaughter or further fattening.

1996	*Sheep*	*Cattle*
January	57,300	35,500
February	24,200	20,000
March	20,000	12,600
April	300	0
May	68	0
June	2,500	0
July	152,500	0
August	127,300	0
September	131,200	0
October	121,500	0
November	93,000	0
December	75,500	0

These figures remain provisional and subject to amendment.

Figures on the export of pigs are incomplete. I will write to the hon. Member when we have more information.

Diseased Animals (Compensation)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total amount paid as compensation for *(a)* poultry, *(b)* cattle and *(c)* other animals as a result of the slaughter of diseased or suspected diseased animals in each year from 1985 to 1991; and if he will make a statement. [15713]

Mrs. Browning: The information requested on slaughter compensation is as follows:

£000s

	1985–86	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*
(a) Poultry	—	—	—	4	1,237	1,779	1,709
(b) Cattle	1,819	682	372	1,463	4,797	12,440	27,699
(c) Others	—	458	277	—	169	116	8
Total	1,819	1,140	649	1,467	6,203	14,335	29,416

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the minimum age requirements enforced by his Department. [15925]

Mr. Boswell: Details of minimum age requirements enforced by my Department are given in the table.

Legislation	*Minimum age requirement*
Agricultural Wages Act 1948	19 years for adult rate of pay; 18 years for flexible working contract; 19 years for higher rates of pay depending on qualifications.
Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 (as amended)	Anyone using an agricultural pesticide is required to hold a certificate of competence unless they were born on or before 31 December 1964; or are using it under the direct personal supervision of a person who holds such a certificate; are applying the pesticide on their own land or land belonging to their employer; or the pesticide is being used for a non-agricultural purpose.
Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995	Licensing of slaughtermen: 18 years for applicants for either a certificate of competence (required to be presented with an application for a registered licence) or a provisional licence (Regulation 4(3), Sections 4(2)(c) and 7(1)(b) respectively refer).
Veterinary Surgeons Act 1996, Schedule 3	Allows exemptions from restrictions on the practice of veterinary surgery by: persons under 17 years old undergoing instruction in animal husbandry, provided the instruction is given by a registered veterinary surgeon and at a recognised institution unqualified people aged 18 or over carrying out specified minor operations.
Veterinary Surgeon's (Exemption) Order 1962)1962/2557)	Relating to the performance of minor treatment, tests or operations by a person aged under 18 years. (Article 4)
The Lead in Food Regulations 1979 (S,I 1979 No. 1254) as amended by The Lead in Food (Amendment) Regulations 1985 (S.I 1985 No. 912)	Whilst not strictly a minimum age requirement, these regulations contain specific maximum limits for lead in food for infants

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16762]

Mr. Boswell: Non-departmental public bodies are established to operate at arm's length from government, often under specific statutory powers. An NDPB's governing board is responsible for the management and control of the body's functions.

Sponsoring divisions within the Ministry are responsible for monitoring the performance of the NDPBs they sponsor, and ensuring that they operate within the framework of controls set out in the Treasury and Cabinet Office guidance "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: A Guide for Departments".

BSE

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what was the breakdown of his estimate of the cost of the BSE crisis to date in his speech to the annual conference of the National Farmers Union of 5 February; [15487]

(2) what sums have been provided to cover the costs of the BSE crisis for *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000. [19196]

Mr. Baldry: This Government have committed £3.5 billion on BSE-related expenditure for the years 1996–97 to 1999–2000, as follows:

£ million

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–1999*	*1999–2000*
Over-30-months scheme	700	350	330	330
Selective cull	20	160	—	—
Intervention	190	290	190	100
Calf slaughter premium	50	60	50	50
Disposal chain	210	60	—	—
EC-funded beef support measures	160	—	—	—
Agriculture departments' costs	70	70	70	70
Other measures	50	90	—	—
Savings on exports refunds	–80	–70	–60	–60
Total	1,370	1,010	580	490

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the locations of the landfill sites where *(a)* beef and *(b)* beef-related products bought by the Intervention Board under the beef stocks transfer scheme and the beef and beef products (storage and disposal services) scheme were disposed of. [16848]

Mr. Baldry: No stocks of beef or beef products collected under the beef stocks transfer scheme or beef and beef products (storage and disposal services) scheme have been disposed of yet.

Genetically Modified Maize

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the European countries which have imposed an import ban on non-labelled Ciba Geigy's GM maize; and if he will make a statement. [17149]

Mrs. Browning: Luxembourg and Austria have both announced import bans on GM maize.

Such action is illegal under Community law unless new information showing a safety hazard can be produced that was not considered prior to the Community marketing authorisation being issued. No such information has been provided by either country to date and the Commission has therefore indicated its intention to take early action to force the removal of both bans.

Food Safety (Charities)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from voluntary bodies relating to the application of food safety regulations to food provided for fund raising at charitable functions; if he will list the organisations concerned; and if he will make a statement. [16172]

Mrs. Browning: A recent public consultation on food safety regulations of particular interest to voluntary bodies was undertaken last year by the Department of Health on amendments to the Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991. All responses from voluntary bodies have been placed in the Department of Health's library, where they can be examined.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers under the countryside stewardship scheme have received total payments per annum of *(a)* under £6,000 and *(b)* £6,000 to £10,000, *(c)* £10,000 to £20,000 and *(d)* over £20,000 in (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97. [17258]

Mr. Boswell: This information could currently be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which (a) and (b) have attended indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16567]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No Ministers or officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have attended a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee.

Fish Food

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if mechanically recovered meat from the non-specified bovine offal obtained from calves may be used in the manufacture of fish food. [16998]

Mrs. Browning: Mechanically recovered meat does not originate from offal. It is made from the residual meat left on bones.

Animal Feed Labelling

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what regulations his Department has made regarding the labelling of animal feed contents; and if he will make a statement. [17150]

Mrs. Browning: The declaration of compound feed ingredients, either by specific name or category of ingredient, has been a compulsory requirement of EU law since 1991, implemented in Great Britain by the Feeding Stuffs Regulations. Although most feed compounders originally chose to declare by category, the vast majority have switched over the last year to full ingredient listing.

The UK is supporting a Commission proposal which will delete the category "land animal products", and thus require any animal material to be separately identified.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

National Audit Office

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission what proposals exist for further review of the National Audit Office's powers. [15556]

Sir Terence Higgins: The Nolan Committee has made various suggestions for the development of the role of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the NAO. In the White Paper on the governance of public bodies published last week the Government proposed certain extensions to the Comptroller and Auditor General's work including the CAG's right to inspect all non-departmental public bodies and associated companies; and the examination of compliance with codes of conduct.

The Government, however, did not take up earlier recommendations made by the Chairman of the Committee of Public Accounts and my predecessor for the CAG to carry out the full financial audit of all executive non-departmental public bodies. Nor did they provide for the CAG to have the right to inspect the books of those housing associations and certain other bodies which are funded by central Government or a guaranteed right of access to all private contractors of Government Departments and agencies.

I understand that the Labour party has also put forward proposals concerning the future remit of the CAG and the NAO, but the Commission has not received these.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* his Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13469]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Expenditure from 1991–1997

	Publicity excluding advertising £	*Advertising* £
1991–1992	2,729,753.00	4,834,813.00
1992–1993	15,058,691.00	4,452,277.00
1993–1994	12,368,615.00	5,964,988.00
1994–1995	16,457,606.00	3,597,308.00
1995–1996	13,702,205.00	6,383,467.00
1996–1997[1]	11,262,567.00	3,937,476.00
January–March,1997[1]	5,513,229.00	1,387,580.00

Notes:
[1] Figures are estimated.
1. The table shows the overall expenditure by this Department and its agencies on publicity and advertising since 1991–92.
2. We do not make any distinction between publicity and advertising and public information campaigns.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many Child Support Agency cases are overdue for their two-year review. [15087]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 20 February 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency maintenance assessment reviews.

I am unable to answer your question in precisely the form as you have requested. The starting point of the periodic review process is the automated issue of the Periodic Review Form by the Child Support Computer System. This currently takes place every two years after a maintenance assessment has been completed. The Agency reassesses cases where forms are returned and all information is provided. We estimate we will complete over 41,000 periodic reviews during 1996/97.

In many cases the periodic review will not result in a revised assessment, because relevant changes in circumstances are generally reported promptly to the Agency by either the parent with care or the absent parent. Once a change of circumstances is reported, a review of the assessment is carried out, so many cases awaiting their periodic review are in fact continuing on up to date information.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the basis of the calculation of the benefit savings figure under the headings *(a)* maintenance exceeds rate of benefit and *(b)* resulting from pre-CSA assessment paid through agency collection service to Secretary of State, in the accounts drawn up by the Child Support Agency. [15605]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 20 February 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the calculation of benefit savings.

In your question you have referred to "accounts" and I have assumed that you are requesting further explanation of two categories in my previous answer of 21 January 1997, ie Maintenance Exceeds Rate of Benefit (known as maintenance cessations), and Resulting from Pre-CSA Assessments; Paid Through Agency Collection Service (known as Liable Relatives Collection Office (LRCO) receipts).

Maintenance cessations benefit savings are recorded where the amount of maintenance paid to the parent with care exceeds the amount of Income Support entitlement and benefit therefore ceases. Such savings come from two types of cases; cases where Income Support is no longer payable before a maintenance assessment is completed, usually as a result of the absent parent agreeing to make a voluntary payment (details of which are collected by Agency field offices), and cases where Income Support is no longer payable after a maintenance assessment has been completed (details of which are collected by the Child Support Agency Centres).

Benefit savings take account of the Income Support that would otherwise have been in payment. This is calculated by using the last weekly payment of Income Support multiplied by 51 weeks. Departmental statisticians have confirmed that this is a safe figure to use.

The calculation of benefit savings attributable to LRCO receipts is a simple process. These receipts represent maintenance payments (voluntary payments and court orders) diverted to the Department

under pre-April 1993 arrangements and collected by the Agency. They are recorded and are counted towards the Agency's benefit savings total.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many payment accounts at the Child Support Agency collection service were *(a)* pre-CSA arrangements and *(b)* CSA assessments at the end of each month since April 1994. [15606]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 20 February 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency accounts.

The Child Support collection service holds only those cases where a maintenance assessment has been made. Maintenance arrangements made prior to the inception of the Agency (Pre CSA Arrangements) are not paid via this service. Pre CSA Arrangements are paid direct between parents, via the courts or via the Agency's Liable Relatives Collection Office (LRCO) where the parent with care is in receipt of benefit and the payment is due to the Secretary of State.

The number of cases using the Child Support collection service and the number using the LRCO system are available from April 1995 only. The attached tables detail the number of payment accounts that were live on each system at the end of each month from April 1995 to date.

I hope this is helpful.

Live accounts within Child Support Collection Service

	1995–96	*1996–97*
April	175,113	209,134
May	177,048	211,670
June	179,893	213,744
July	183,058	215,736
August	188,477	219,979
September	192,528	222,104
October	196,670	224,913
November	201,142	227,373
December	202,762	230,316
January	205,193	Not yet available
February	207,640	Not yet available
March	207,465	Not yet available

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total publicity and advertising budget for the Child Support Agency, and what proportion of this was spent on posters in the last year. [15658]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 20 February 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency publicity and advertising budget and what proportion has been spent on posters in the last year.

The 1996/97 budget for publicity and advertising is £643,695.

At 31 January 1997, the Agency has spent £450,977 on publicity and advertising. Of this, 15% has been spent on posters.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the sums collected by the Child Support Agency collection service for each month since April 1994 showing *(a)* the amount which is recovered by his Department to offset benefit money which has already been paid out, *(b)* the amount which produces a saving against current income support payments and *(c)* the amount which produces a saving against current family credit payments. [15607]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 20 February 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about benefit savings.

In my reply to you of 20 January 1997, Official Report, (Han. Ref: Vol 288, Col 567), I gave a breakdown of all benefit savings collected from 1 April 1994 up to 30 November 1996. This updated the information given in response to your previous questions on this subject. The details you have now requested are contained in that reply.

I assume that the information that you require at part (a) of your question refers to cases where maintenance is paid through the Agency and the full Income Support payment continues. Details of these cases are shown in the previous responses under the headings "Resulting from pre-CSA Assessments: Paid Through Agency Collection Service to SoS" and "Resulting from CSA Assessments: Paid Through Agency Collection Service to SoS".

The amount producing a saving against current Income Support payments where maintenance passes from the absent parent to the parent with care, and Income Support is reduced to take account of this, is shown under the headings "Resulting from CSA and pre-CSA Assessments: Paid Direct by Absent Parent to Parent With Care", and "Resulting from CSA Assessments: Deductions from Absent Parent's IS Payments".

The amount producing a saving against current Family Credit payments is included under the heading "Reductions in Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance resulting from CSA Assessments". Data for this category is obtained by a computer scan. Family Credit accounts for the bulk of the saving recorded, but to isolate the Family Credit elements from the Disability Working Allowance elements to obtain an exact figure would involve disproportionate cost.

Figures are now available to 30 December 1996, and are shown in the table attached.

I hope this is helpful.

Benefit savings update 1996–97 (£ million)

Category of benefit savings	*December 1996*	*1996–97 YTD*
Resulting from pre-CSA assessments: Paid through Agency collection service to SoS	0.02	0.51
Resulting from CSA and pre-CSA assessments: Paid direct by absent parent to parent with care	9.03	85.89
Resulting from CSA assessments: Paid through Agency collection service to SoS	7.87	69.76
Deductions from absent parent's I S payments	0.29	3.52
Income Support claim cessations: Maintenance exceeds rate of benefit	0.53	4.45
Income Support claim withdrawn within four weeks of CSA action	10.19	115.19

Benefit savings update 1996–97 (£ million)

Category of benefit savings	*December 1996*	*1996–97 YTD*
Reductions in Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance resulting from CSA assessments	2.70	35.49
Housing Benefit/Council Tax reductions resulting from CSA assessments	3.49	39.53
Total	34.12	354.34

Benefits Agency

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his policy towards Benefits Agency officials *(a)* visiting demonstrations on road works sites for benefit purposes and *(b)* denying benefit payments to persons believed to be, or known to be, occupying land in the area of road construction; how this policy has changed in the past two years; what new guidance he has issued since 1 January 1996; and if he will make a statement. [15928]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Nicholson, dated 20 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will make a statement on his policy towards Benefits Agency (BA) officials (a) visiting demonstrations on road works sites for benefit purposes and (b) denying benefit payments to persons believed to be, or known to be, occupying land in the area of road construction; how this policy has changed in the past two years; what new guidance he has issued since 1st January 1996; and if he will make a statement.

The BA does not routinely visit demonstrations on road work sites for benefit purposes. The Agency has a policy of visiting to protect public funds and ensure customers receive their correct entitlement. Where certain criteria are met, a visit is made before Income Support or Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based) is awarded, which are listed at appendix A. Visits are also made when customers in receipt of these benefits meet certain criteria, which are listed at appendix B.

The Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) customers must be available for work and seek it actively, and the same rules applied for several years before the introduction of JSA. The JSA rules require customers to be immediately willing and able to take up work of at least 40 hours a week, at times which give them reasonable prospects of securing employment. They must also take realistic steps to look for work each week. Full guidance on the conditions was issued for the introduction of JSA in October 1996. Jobcentre staff apply them rigorously to all JSA customers, including those known or believed to be protesting by occupying a building site.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Appendix A

Unexplained background to claim or claim incomplete

Number of children inconsistent with child benefit declared

Jobseeker/Customer has no National Insurance number

Recent separation

No Fixed Abode

Request to backdate claim more than one month

Habitual Residence Test

Known at risk address

Customer may be living together as husband and wife with another person who has not been declared as their partner

Random Local Selection—up to 20 per cent. of activity

Guidance exists on the meaning of each criteria

Appendix B

Lone parent in receipt of Income Support (IS)

Jobseeker in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA)

Customer incapable/unavailable for work

Pensioners over 60 years and 3 months but less than 65 years and 4 months

Customer/Jobseeker or partner self-employed prior to claiming IS/JSA

Customer/Jobseeker or partner currently self-employed

Customer/Jobseeker or partner is an employed earner

Customer/Jobseeker or partner has other income

Customer or partner aged 67–69 in receipt of IS

Local selection

Benefit Expenditure

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the increase in benefit expenditure in real terms since 1979. [15980]

Mr. Burt: Social Security benefit expenditure has increased by 88 per cent. in real terms since 1979.

Source:

March 1996 Social Security departmental report and earlier equivalents.

Carer Premium

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women currently receive the carer premium with (i) income support, (ii) housing benefit and (iii) council tax benefit. [15798]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Benefit	*Male recipients*	*Female recipients*	*Total recipients*
Income support[1]	92,000	68,000	159,000
Housing benefit[2]	—	—	87,000
Council tax benefit[2]	—	—	116,000

Notes:

1. Figures as at February 1996.
2. Figures as at May 1995.
3. All numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand, and totals may not sum.
4. It is not possible to identify the sex of those people whose housing benefit and council tax benefit assessments include the carer premium.
5. The figures given for income support represent the sex of the claimant who is a member of a benefit unit for which there is entitlement to the carer premium. The benefit unit may be a single person or a couple, and the claimant may or may not be the carer.
6. People in receipt of housing benefit whose assessment includes a carer premium, can also be in receipt of council tax benefit. There is therefore some overlap in the figures for these benefits.

Sources:

[1] The income support figures are from the May 1995 and February 1996 "Quarterly Statistical Enquiry".

[2] The latest housing benefit and council tax benefit figures are from the May 1995 housing benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. enquiry.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the annual cost and *(b)* the numbers gaining if the extended housing benefit scheme were to be introduced for people in receipt of (i) incapacity benefits and (ii) invalid care allowance within 26 weeks of starting a job. [15871]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

The cost of extending the scheme in a full year to people who received incapacity benefit within 26 weeks of starting a job is estimated to be in the region of £4 million with around 25,000 people affected[1].

Information does not exist to provide a relief estimate for ex-invalid care allowance recipients.

Note:

[1] This estimate applies only to individuals registering as unemployed after leaving incapacity benefit and is based on data from March 1995 to February 1996.

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of *(a)* local authority and *(b)* housing association tenants (i) not in receipt and (ii) in receipt of housing benefit in each district of Northamptonshire. [15777]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Local authority tenancies

Local authority	*Total tenancies*	*Non-housing benefit tenants*	*Housing benefit tenants*
Corby	7,240	3,250	3,980
Daventry	3,760	1,700	2,070
East Northants	4,120	1,730	2,390
Kettering	4,690	1,540	3,150
Northampton South	15,040	5,050	9,990
Northants	3,500	1,500	2,000
Wellingborough	5,650	2,470	3,180

Housing association tenancies

Local authority	*Total tenancies*	*Non-housing benefit tenants*	*Housing benefit tenants*
Corby	500	140	350
Daventry	320	10	300
East Northants	620	160	460
Kettering	590	150	440
Northampton South	1,630	640	990
Northants	210	40	160
Wellingborough	680	230	460

Note:

Totals may not sum due to rounding to the nearest 10.

Sources:

1. Local authority tenancies—Department of Environment annual housing investment programme (HIP1) returns as at 1 April 1996.
2. Housing association tenancies—Housing Corporation's annual HAR10/1 returns as at 31 March 1996.
3. Housing benefit management information system, 100 per cent. quarterly stock count enquiry for housing benefit–Council Tax Benefit recipients with and without income support, for each local authority in Northamptonshire taken at the end of May 1996.

Earnings Limits

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the annual cost and *(b)* the numbers gaining if the earnings limits for (i) incapacity benefit, (ii) severe disablement allowance and (iii) invalid care allowance, were raised to the lower earning limit for 1997–98. [15870]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

It is estimated that 5,000 invalid care allowance claimants would benefit each year if the ICA earnings limit were raised to the lower earnings limit at an annual cost of £5 million.

Notes:

1. Estimates are based on sample data which may be unrepresentative.
2. Estimates are rounded to the nearest 5,000 (claimants) and £5 million (expenditure).

Source:

"Family Resources Survey 1994–95".

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the annual cost and *(b)* the numbers gaining if people could qualify for disability working allowance by virtue of having been in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits (i) six months before the disability working allowance claim and (ii) a year before the disability working allowance claim. [15799]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information required to make such an estimate is not available.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his current estimate of *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the numbers gaining from a full disregard of spouse earnings in disability working allowance claims. [16667]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 9 December 1996, *Official Report*, column 67.

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16187]

Mr. Burt: The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Unfunded Pension Liabilities

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what actions he has taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs *(a)* 14,

(b) 15 and *(c)* 16 of the First report of the Social Security Committee relating to unfunded pension liabilities in the European Union, HC23, Session 1996–97. [16024]

Mr. Heald: The Government published their response to the Committee's report on 20 December 1996 (Cm 3519) setting out the actions it is taking to implement the recommendations.

Pensions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate (i) the number of *(a)* employees and *(b)* self-employed workers who are not making any contribution to private or occupational pensions and (ii) the proportion of this group which is not contributing to (1) state earnings-related pensions or (2) the basic state pension in their own right. [16922]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

Information on private pension membership from the 1994 general household survey suggests that approximately 6.6 million employees and 1.6 million self-employed people were not current members of occupational or personal pension schemes. It is not possible to identify how many of these were not contributing to SERPS or to the basic state retirement pension.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate *(a)* the number of contributors to (i) company or occupational final salary schemes, (ii) company or occupational money purchase schemes, (iii) group personal pensions and (iv) personal pensions in 1992 and currently and *(b)* in each date and category the median size of annual contributions from both company and individual contributors. [16931]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The 1991 Government Actuary's survey of occupational pension schemes estimated that there were 9.8 million members of defined-benefit occupational schemes, of whom 8.4 million were in contributory schemes; and 0.9 million members of defined-contribution occupational schemes, of whom 0.7 million were in contributory schemes—although 0.2 million of them were in schemes which required them to contribute only the national insurance contracted-out rebate.

The number of contributors to group personal pensions is not known but it is estimated that there may be in the region of half a million members of such schemes at present.

Inland Revenue data indicate that in 1992–93 there were a total of around 10.8 million personal pension arrangements qualifying for income tax relief, including group personal pensions, retirement annuity contracts and free-standing additional voluntary contributions arrangements. It is not possible to say how many individual pension holders this represents, since one person may hold several arrangements, nor how many of the arrangements actually received contributions in the year. The number of such arrangements in 1994–95 was 11.7 million.

Total employee and employer contributions to occupational pension schemes in 1991 were estimated to be £8 billion and £17.6 billion respectively; a division between defined-benefit and defined-contribution schemes is not available. Individual contributions to the personal pension arrangements identified above were estimated to total £4.7 billion in 1992–93; employer contributions were estimated to be £0.7 billion. Estimates for 1994–95 are £5.6 billion for individual contributions and £0.6 billion for employer contributions.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will calculate the total reduction in future expenditure on the state earnings-related pension scheme at net present value, arising from membership of appropriate personal pensions, assuming the social discount rate used by his Department. [13842]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 4 February 1997]:* For the years 1987–88 to 1994–95, the latest period for which certified figures are available, £7.2 billion at net present value has been saved in future payments of the state earnings-related pension scheme. This figure has been calculated using the GDP deflator and a social discount rate of 3.75 per cent. consistent with the Government Actuary's review of contracting out terms (Cm 3221).

Appeal Tribunals

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many notices issued by the clerks to each of the social security appeal tribunals covering the London boroughs of Southwark and Lambeth between 21 October and 21 December 1996, directing the parties to notify him if they wished an oral hearing to be heard, have resulted in requests for oral hearings by *(a)* the claimant only, *(b)* the adjudication officer only and *(c)* both the claimant and the adjudication officer; and how many of those requests were made within 10 days of receipt of the direction. [16925]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for the Independent Tribunal Service.

WALES

Local Government Legislation

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the legislation for which his Department has been responsible which affects *(a)* local government finance and *(b)* other local government responsibilities in the present Parliament. [15831]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 is the only legislation since April 1992 affecting local government in Wales for which the Department has been responsible.

Overgrazing

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what progress has been made by the Welsh Office Agricultural Department in addressing cases of overgrazing in Wales identified by *(a)* wildlife trusts and *(b)* others; [17245]

(2) if he will make a statement on the effects of large-scale overgrazing in the Welsh uplands on biodiversity in Wales, indicating the evidence which underlies his assessment. [17244]

Mr. Hague: My Department's policy is to seek to enforce the overgrazing conditions which attach to the payment of livestock production subsidies. These conditions are intended to prevent land being grazed with too many livestock so that the growth, quality or diversity of the vegetation is adversely affected. Late last year all producers claiming sheep and beef production subsidies were sent a copy of a booklet, "Your Livestock and Your Landscape", which describes how to recognise and deal with overgrazing and inappropriate supplementary feeding. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library.

ADAS is currently considering a number of potential overgrazing cases which my Department has referred to it for technical advice before deciding how to proceed. In considering the handling of such cases, the representations of wildlife trusts and others are taken into account.

Blood Service

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much the Welsh blood service has contributed to the Welsh bone marrow registry for each year since 1986. [17076]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide an annual grant to the Welsh blood service to employ a nurse recruitment officer to develop and maintain the bone marrow donor recruitment programme in Wales. [17087]

Mr. Jones: Health authorities are funded to commission appropriate activities by the Welsh blood service. This is, therefore, a matter for them to consider.

Prescriptions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the adequacy of safeguards preventing multiple pharmacies transferring prescriptions handed in at one pharmacy branch to another branch to maximise payment for additional professional services; and if he will make a statement. [17080]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Office is represented on the efficiency scrutiny on prescription fraud, which has the task of recommending measures to reduce the risk of prescription fraud. The scrutiny team is due to complete its work by the end of March.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what statistics he has collated in respect of the average aggregate prescribing of antibiotics in each of the past five years. [16996]

Mr. Hague: The number of prescription items, for antibacterial drugs, dispensed in each of the past five years is given in the following table:

Prescription items for antibacterial drugs

	Prescription items dispensed (thousands)
1991–92	2,937
1992–93	2,927
1993–94	3,118
1994–95	3,159
1995–96	3,160

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines he has issued to health authorities to prevent pharmacies with branches in more than one health authority area transferring prescriptions handed in at one pharmacy for processing at a pharmacy in another health authority area with a view to maximising the payment of the professional allowance for processing prescriptions. [17081]

Mr. Hague: None.

GCSE Examinations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage and how many children *(a)* sat and *(b)* obtained grades A to C first time in (i) maths and (ii) English language GCSE in Wales in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [17154]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information is not collected centrally on the number of children achieving GCSEs at their first attempt. The following table shows the number and percentage of 15-year-old pupils at school in Wales, who entered and who achieved A* to C in (i) maths and (ii) English Language in 1996.

Number and percentage of 15-year-olds[1] entered and achieving GCSE grade A to C by subject, 1996*

	15-year-olds entered for GCSE		*15-year-olds achieving GCSE grade A* to C*	
	Number	Percentage[2]	Number	Percentage[2]
Mathematics	31,851	86	14,994	40
English Language	32,049	86	17,328	47

[1] Age as at 31 August 1995.

[2] As a percentage of the total number of 15-year-olds at school in Wales in January 1996.

Fundholders

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the average *(a)* management and *(b)* computer costs for a general practitioner fundholding practice in each health authority in Wales in each of the past five years. [17454]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The following payments were made by family health services authorities in respect of general practitioner fundholding practice management allowances in the past five years. Figures include preparatory payments to GPs who will become fundholders in the next financial year, which cannot be separately identified to allow the calculation of an average management allowance.

£'000s

FHSA	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–95*
Clwyd	179	440	569	609	1,003
Dyfed	31	148	325	515	936
Gwent	63	286	499	609	1,072
Gwynedd	0	17	122	232	332
Mid Glamorgan	120	181	245	345	715
Powys	16	103	210	300	538
South Glamorgan	33	85	288	471	829
West Glamorgan	76	362	645	716	1,038

Figures for general practitioners computer costs are not held centrally.

Source

Family health services receipts and payments returns 1991–92 to 1995–96.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many general practitioner fundholders there were in each health authority in Wales in each of the past five years. [17464]

Mr. Jones: The information is given in the following tables.

Number of fundholding practices at 31 March

Health authorities prior to 1 April 1996

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Clwyd	10	18	20	21
Dyfed	2	6	17	21
Gwent	4	13	16	21
Gwynedd	0	1	9	11
Mid Glamorgan	4	7	8	11
Powys	1	5	7	12
South Glamorgan	1	4	18	24
West Glamorgan	4	20	22	25
Total	26	74	117	146

Number of fundholding practices at 31 January

Health authorities from 1 April 1996

	1996–97
Bro Taf	41
Dyfed Powys	49
Gwent	41
Morgannwg	35
North Wales	44
Total	210

Health Authority Costs

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the administrative costs of each health authority in Wales in each of the last five years. [17466]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is contained in the following table. Information on the five new health authorities for 1996–97 is not yet available. A reorganisation between East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire district health authorities began in 1992–93 and concluded in 1994–95.

Administrative costs of District Health Authorities in Wales

£000

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Clwyd	12,406	14,011	2,444	1,933	1,816
East Dyfed	7,686	8,569	3,668	1,784	1,733
Pembrokeshire	3,327	169	186	147	0
Gwent	12,691	14,279	4,591	1,596	1,513
Gwynedd	6,616	8,237	9,693	1,057	992
Mid Glamorgan	14,212	8,944	13,297	8,434	8,549
Powys	3,016	3,683	667	540	700
South Glamorgan	20,952	24,299	21,596	21,478	2,269
West Glamorgan	10,662	11,729	11,158	7,516	6,680

Source:

Financial returns from district health authorities.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total number of cases of BSE in Northern Ireland to date; and what percentage this represents of the total for the United Kingdom. [16247]

Mr. Ancram: A total of 1,746 cases of BSE have occurred in Northern Ireland up to 7 February 1997. This represents 1.04 per cent. of the total cases for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the cattle herds in Northern Ireland, *(a)* remain unaffected by BSE and *(b)* would qualify for a United Kingdom certified herds scheme. [16210]

Mr. Ancram: Approximately 97 per cent. of herds in Northern Ireland remain unaffected by BSE. These herds would qualify for a United Kingdom certified herds scheme as drafted at present.

Farm and Countryside Enhancement Scheme

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications were received in respect of the farm and countryside enhancement scheme; and of these how many were approved. [15469]

Mr. Ancram: A total of 4,144 applications were received under the farm and countryside enhancement scheme. None have been approved as no farms have yet been visited. A total of 2,532 were accepted before closure.

Schools (Newtownards)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the present enrolments at *(a)* Scrabo high school and *(b)* Movilla high school in Newtownards; and what is the maximum enrolment that could be accommodated in the existing buildings at each of those schools. [16106]

Mr. Ancram: There are currently 283 pupils at Scrabo high school and 858 pupils at Movilla high school, in Newtownards. Scrabo high school can accommodate 515 pupils, whereas Movilla high school can accommodate 900 pupils.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals there are for a new integrated secondary school in Newtownards; if such proposals have been considered by the South Eastern education and library board; if a site for such a school has been identified; and if he will make a statement. [16105]

Mr. Ancram: The South-eastern education and library board published a development proposal for a new integrated secondary school in the North Down area on 10 September 1996. The board formally objected to the proposal on 5 November 1996. My Department was advised on 9 December 1996 by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education that a site had been identified for the proposed school in Newtownards.

I have decided not to approve the development proposal as I was not satisfied, on the information available, that the school had the potential to sustain a reasonable religious balance between Roman Catholic and Protestant pupils within an overall long-term enrolment of 500.

Electoral Register

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the total number of electors for each of the new parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland for the 1997–98 register of electors effective from 16 February. [16213]

Mr. Ancram: The chief electoral officer of Northern Ireland has provided the figures shown in the table which show the total eligible electorate for each of the new parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland. The figures shown in brackets represent those 17-year-olds who are registered, and who may or may not be able to vote depending upon whether their 18th birthday falls before or after polling day.

1997 Register of Electors for Northern Ireland Total Eligible Parliamentary Electorate by Constituency as first published

Parliamentary constituencies	*Electorate*
Belfast East	62,278 (670)
Belfast North	65,193 (773)
Belfast South	63,948 (639)
Belfast West	62,523 (926)
East Antrim	59,591 (788)
East Londonderry	59,625 (997)
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	65,547 (1,189)
Foyle	68,574 (1,197)
Lagan Valley	72,025 (1,004)
Mid Ulster	59,814 (1,228)
North Antrim	73,354 (1,184)
North Down	63,723 (895)
Newry and Armagh	71,685 (1,297)
South Antrim	70,288 (1,097)
South Down	70,931 (1,351)
Strangford	70,742 (957)
Upper Bann	71,293 (1,123)
West Tyrone	59,064 (1,125)
Total Electorate	1,190,198 (18,440)

Road Accidents (Comber and Dundonald)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many accidents have been reported in each of the past five years along the Comber Road, Dundonald and the Belfast road, Comber; how many persons were injured or killed as a result of these accidents; and what proposals there are to improve road safety along these roads. [16094]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. W. J. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter to Mr. John D. Taylor from W. J. McCoubrey, dated 20 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to respond to your recently tabled PQ about accidents on the Comber Road, Dundonald and the Belfast Road, Comber and proposals to improve road safety on this route.

As you are aware, the RUC are responsible for accident statistics and they have provided the following information in respect of road traffic injury accidents on the Comber—Belfast road (from the Upper Newtownards Road junction, Dundonald to the Killinchy Road/Killinchy Street junction, Comber):-

Year	*Accidents*	*Persons killed*	*Seriously injured*	*Slightly injured*
1992	20	0	11	30
1993	15	1	1	25
1994	24	0	14	28
1995	22	1	3	29
1996	24	0	2	40

Roads Service intends to carry out a scheme to realign a 350 metre section of carriageway at Barnhill along this route. This work is expected to commence in early summer. A scheme to realign a further section of carriageway between Millmount Road and Peartree Hill is also being considered. This proposal is at a very early stage and no decision has been made as to its position in the minor works programme.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Social Security

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many people are waiting for an appeal to a tribunal on their claim for *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* attendance allowance; [16452]

(2) how many people in Belfast, West were in receipt of incapacity benefit in February 1996; [16459]

(3) what percentage of decisions on incapacity benefit have been reversed following an appeal to a tribunal; [16463]

(4) many of the claims for incapacity benefit have been disallowed since its introduction; [16461]

(5) how many people in the constituency of Belfast, West applied for disability living allowance in each of the calendar years 1994, 1995 and 1996; [16465]

(6) how many people in Belfast, West are currently awaiting a review decision regarding a claim for disability living allowance; [16450]

(7) how many people in Belfast, West applied to the social fund for assistance in each year from 1993 to 1996; [16453]

(8) how many people in Northern Ireland have made claims for incapacity benefit since April 1996; [16460]

(9) how many people in the constituency of Belfast, West were awarded *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* attendance allowance in (i) 1994, (ii) 1995 and (iii) 1996; [16449]

(10) what *(a)* percentage and *(b)* number of people who were disallowed incapacity benefit between January 1996 and January 1997, appealed against the decision; [16464]

(11) what is the average length of time a claimant already has to wait before receiving a decision on their application for incapacity benefit; [16462]

(12) how many claimants in Belfast, West are currently in receipt of incapacity benefit; [16458]

(13) how many people in the constituency of Belfast, West applied for attendance allowance in the calendar years 1994, 1995 and 1996; [16466]

(14) how many people in Belfast, West are waiting for a review decision regarding their claim for attendance allowance. [16451]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subjects has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie and I have asked him to arrange for a response to be given.

Letter to Dr. Joe Hendron from Gerry Kennan, dated 20 February 1997.

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and the Social Fund. As Mr. Wylie is presently away on business, I am replying on his behalf.

Ref: 16449

Information on the number of people who were awarded Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance in the Parliamentary constituency of Belfast West is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, as shown below, information is held on the number of Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance recipients at specific dates during the years in question, although limited to 1996 for the latter.

Date	*Number of recipients*
Disability living allowance	
November 1994	7,835
November 1995	9,491
November 1996	10,702
Attendance allowance	
February 1996	3,624
November 1996	4,330

No records are maintained on the number of people in the Parliamentary constituency of Belfast West who are awaiting a review of a decision regarding their claim for Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance. This information could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost. [16452]

The number of outstanding appeals regarding claims for Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance is shown in the table below. The figures include submissions being prepared by the Agency, submissions which have been forwarded to the Independent Tribunal Service for hearings to be arranged and appeals where a tribunal decision has been given but not yet implemented.

Benefit type	*Appeals outstanding (14 February 1997)*
Disability living allowance	1,188
Attendance allowance	62

Ref: 16453

Information on the number of people in the Parliamentary constituency of Belfast West who applied to the Social Fund in each year from 1993 to 1996 cannot be given in the format requested as areas covered by the relevant Social Security Offices overlap with other constituencies.

Ref: 16458

The most recent information available is for week ending 30 November 1996 which shows that 5,011 people in the Parliamentary constituency of Belfast West were claiming Incapacity Benefit.

Ref: 16459

The number of people in the Parliamentary constituency of Belfast West who were in receipt of Incapacity Benefit on 28 February 1996 was 4,965.

Ref: 16460

Since April 1996, 54,542 claims have been made to Incapacity Benefit in Northern Ireland.

Ref: 16561

The number of Incapacity Benefit claims which have been disallowed from its introduction in April 1995 is 30,700. This figure, however, does not include the number of claims disallowed before 1 April 1996 because of deficient National Insurance contributions or late claim. To obtain this information would generate disproportionate costs.

Ref: 16462

The average clearance time for Incapacity Benefit claims for January 1997 is 6.69 days. The average clearance time is measured from the date the claim is received until either entitlement is determined, the claim is withdrawn, or is otherwise closed.

Ref: 16463

Unfortunately, the information in relation to the percentage of Incapacity Benefit decisions which were reversed by a Social Security Appeal Tribunal is not held in the format requested and to

obtain it would involve disproportionate costs. However, this information is held by the Independent Tribunal Service, Cleaver House, and I have sent them a copy of your question.

Ref: 16464

From 1 January 1996 to 31 January 1997 a total of 23,778 Incapacity Benefit claims have been disallowed. The figure does not include the number of claims disallowed before 1 April 1996 because of deficient national insurance contributions or late claim and to obtain this information would generate disproportionate costs. The total number of appeals received for the same period was 6,428 which equates to 27% of claims disallowed.

Ref: 16465, 16466

The figures for the number of people in the Parliamentary constituency of Belfast West who applied for Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance in 1994, 1995 and 1996 are not maintained on a constituency basis.

I hope this information is helpful.

Electoral Abuse

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he plans to take to counter electoral abuse in the forthcoming elections in Northern Ireland. [16467]

Mr. Ancram: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, countering electoral abuse at election time involves participation by a number of groups on a number of different fronts. My Department has already issued to all households in Northern Ireland a document reminding voters about specified identity documents. This serves to remind people to safeguard the integrity of their own documents. In the meantime, the chief electoral officer is in contact with the Royal Ulster Constabulary to ensure maximum awareness of the criminal offence of any voters being in possession of identity documents for the purposes of impersonation. The chief electoral officer and his staff will be particularly vigilant with postal and proxy vote applications and will pass to the RUC any evidence of abuse for investigation. The parties themselves will need to select and brief carefully those people they chose to act as their polling agents as these people have a particularly important role to pay in identifying abuse actually at the polling stations.

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of *(a)* energy use and *(b)* waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16431]

Mr. Moss: The central Government estate in Northern Ireland achieved a 13 per cent. improvement in energy efficiency by 31 March 1996 (against the Government target of 15 per cent.). This compares very favourably with other parts of the central Government estate in the UK.

This has been achieved by measures such as the promotion of energy efficiency through an inter-departmental committee; energy audits; staff awareness programmes; and buildings energy management systems.

Waste management strategies are included in the green housekeeping action plans for all Government Departments in Northern Ireland. The strategies cover such issues as the disposal of waste paper and the recycling of other materials. The steps taken include a centralised contract for the disposal of waste paper, a Northern Ireland-wide procedure for the collection and disposal of confidential waste and recycling schemes for aluminium cans and toner cartridges.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which *(a)* and *(b)* have attended indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16577]

Sir John Wheeler: No Ministers or officials from the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments have attended a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee.

Ulster College of Arts

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary for State for Northern Ireland what are the basic qualifications required for entrance into the Ulster college of arts; and what procedures ensure that the required standard for entrance is met. [17086]

Mr. Ancram: The university of Ulster's faculty of art and design (which subsumed the Ulster college) offers a comprehensive range of courses at different levels, the entrance requirements for which are set out in detail in the university's prospectus. Admission criteria are established and reviewed annually by the faculty and the central university authorities.

Irish and Ulster-Scots

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent on the promotion and support of *(a)* Irish and *(b)* Ulster-Scots cultural activities excluding the Irish language expenditure, identified in his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *57*, in each of the past five years. [17084]

Mr. Ancram: Other than projects with a distinct language dimension, it is not possible to categorise objectively cultural activities which receive support as Irish or Ulster-Scots.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much the promotion and teaching of the Irish language in English-medium schools cost in 1995–96, broken down by *(a)* teacher costs, *(b)* teaching materials, *(c)* inspectorate and examination costs, *(d)* teacher training, and *(e)* overhead costs. [17083]

Mr. Ancram: Teaching of the Irish language is an integral part of the curriculum in many schools. The breakdown of financial information in the form requested is not available.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been employed in each of the last five years by direct and indirect Government funding on the promotion and teaching of *(a)* the Irish language and *(b)* the Ulster-Scots language. [17085]

Mr. Ancram: The primary purpose of funding projects with an Irish language or Ulster-Scots language dimension is not employment creation. The information requested is not collated centrally and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the areas in Northern Ireland currently affected by Newcastle disease; and if he will make a statement. [17148]

Mr. Ancram: Newcastle disease outbreaks have currently been confirmed in the Lurgan, Dungannon, Larne, Coagh, Newtownards, mid-Antrim, Randalstown and Cloughmills areas of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate how many *(a)* farms and *(b)* birds have been infected with Newcastle disease in the recent outbreak; and if he will make a statement. [17147]

Mr. Ancram: At 20 February 1997 there was a total of nine premises in Northern Ireland infected with Newcastle disease. Approximately 356,000 birds have been slaughtered on these infected premises.

DEFENCE

Army Tanks

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many tanks the British Army had at its disposal in *(a)* 1967, *(b)* 1970, *(c)* 1980, *(d)* 1990 and *(e)* currently. [14004]

Mr. Soames: Details of Army tank holdings are not available in the form requested across the period concerned.

Holdings of main battle tanks, excluding armoured reconnaissance vehicles and armoured vehicles Royal Engineers for the years 1967, 1970, 1980, 1990, and currently total 694, 658, 640, 699, and 388 respectively.

These figures exclude tanks held by training and research establishments, in store as the war maintenance reserve or awaiting disposal.

The size of the tank force has reduced sharply since the end of the cold war as the threat of massive conventional attack on our continental allies has all but disappeared and our emphasis has shifted towards rapid deployment in response to local or regional crises. However, the smaller tank force today benefits from the greater military effectiveness of the modern Challenger 1 tanks now in service and will be enhanced still further by the introduction to regimental service of Challenger 2.

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide *(a)* his Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13465]

Mr. Soames: The information is not available in the form requested. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 6 February, *Official Report*, column *685*, and 18 February, *Official Report*, column *469–70*.

Ocean Wave 97

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the places to be visited by Ocean Wave 97, *(b)* the dates of the visit in each case, *(c)* which UK companies are using the visits to promote their business, and *(d)* the cost of the tour; and if all costs are being paid for by his Department. [15244]

Mr. Soames: The Royal Navy's Ocean Wave 97 deployment got underway on 13 January. Ships have already made visits to ports in France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Egypt, and Israel, and to Gibraltar and Djibouti. Diplomatic clearances have been granted by host authorities for visits to Turkey, India, the Maldives, Thailand, Brunei, Indonesia, South Korea, New Zealand, Malta and Corfu. On current plans two ships will detach temporarily from the task group to be in Hong Kong in June when the territory is handed back to China. The full Ocean Wave 97 programme has still to be finalised, and is subject to change, but we hope that in addition during the seven-month deployment, ships from the task group will be able to visit ports in the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Pakistan, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, Vietnam, Russian, the Philippines, Australia, and South Africa.

Ocean Wave 97 demonstrates the UK's continued commitment to the Asia-Pacific region after the handover of Hong Kong. It underlines our interest in promoting regional peace and stability, protecting the freedom of international trade, and supporting co-operation and joint working between military forces in the Asia-Pacific region.

The activities and exercises conducted during major Royal Navy deployments such as Ocean Wave, which take place every three to four years, are an important contributor to building up the operational capability which the Commander in Chief Fleet is tasked to deliver. Participating units benefit from the opportunity to train and develop the seamanship and warfare operational skills and tactics of an integrated force. Such interactive training is achievable only when a number of diverse assets are deployed together over a prolonged period. Ocean Wave will also develop the Royal Navy's interoperability with other nations. The task group has already participated in exercises involving the French, Spanish, Dutch and Egyptian navies, and a number of other exercises are planned for later in the deployment. Two of the largest of these will be Exercise Setia Kawan with the Royal Brunei armed forces; and Exercise Flying Fish with our five power defence arrangements—FPDA—partners, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and Singapore, which will be the first ever joint air-maritime FPDA exercise.

The costs of such major deployments are taken into account in cyclical programming. The ships, aircraft, and personnel involved in Ocean Wave would be fully engaged in other activities anyway, and the directly attributable extra costs of the deployment are thus estimated at about £5.5 million. The main elements of this are port and harbour dues, Suez canal transit fees, operational support, additional fuel, and some air travel.

As is usual a deployment of this type, the Royal Navy is pleased to be able to help in the promotion of the UK's wider interests. To this end it will be participating in a number of Defence industry days. UK companies which will participate in Defence industry days, and defence exhibitions associated with Ocean Wave 97, include the following:

AGI Aeronautical and General Instruments, UK
Aircraft Materials
Arran Fire and Safety
Avon Inflatables Ltd.
Avon Polymer Products
Babcock Rosyth Defence Ltd.
BAe Dynamics
BAe SEMA, UK
BAe Systems and Equipment
Barr and Stroud Ltd.
Basys Marine
BNEA
British Aerospace Defence Ltd.
Brown Brothers,
SG Brown
Caley Ocean Systems
Chelsea Instruments
Chernikeef Logs
Clarke Chapman Marine
Cogent Defence Systems
Colebrand
DERA
Divex
DML
Du Pont (UK) Ltd.
EDS Ltd.
Fairey Hydraulics
Ferranti Technologies Ltd.
Flagship Training Ltd.
Francis Searchlights (1990) Ltd.
J&S Franklin Ltd.
FR Aviation
Gearing and Watson
GEC Alsthom-Paxman Diesels Ltd.
GEC Marconi Avionics Ltd.
GEC Marconi Materials Technology
GEC Marconi Projects
GEC Marconi Radar and Defence Systems
GEC Marconi S31
GEC Marconi Underwater Weapons
GEC Marine
GKN Westland Helicopters
Graseby
Hale Hamilton Valves
Howden Airdynamics Group Ltd.
HydroMarine
Hunting Engineering
Irvin Aerospace
Island Plastics Industries Ltd.
Jane's
JJB Consultancy
KaMeWa UK
Kelvin Hughes Ltd.
T. W. Kempton (Corporate Clothing) Ltd.
Kidde Fire Protection
Leyland Trucks
Mara Engineering
Marine Acoustics
Marine Data
Maritime Defence
Matra Marconi Space
Meggitt Avionics
Mitchell Bearings
ML Holdings
MSI Defence
Neptune Sonar
Park Air Electronics
Pain Wessex
Pearson Engineering Ltd.
Permali Gloucester
Pilatus Britten Norman
Pilkington PE Ltd.
Pilkington Thorn Optronics
Polaris International
Power Magnetics
Pyser-SGI Ltd.
Racal Acoustics
Racal Thorn
Redifon MEL/SPT
Remploy Textile Group
Rolls Royce Anstey
Rolls Royce Bristol
Rolls Royce Specialist Engines
Royal Military College of Science
RTK Marine
Shorts Missile Systems Ltd.
Siemens Plessey
Simrad Optronics Ltd.
Slingsby Aviation
Slingsby Engineering
Strachan and Henshaw
Tebbutt and Hall Ltd.
Thompson Valves
Thomson Marconi Sonar Ltd.
Thomson-Thorn Missile Electronics
Thorn Automation
W. and J. Tod
UK Safety Group Ltd.
Ultra Electronics, Command and Control
Ultra Electronics, Electrics Division
Ultra Electronics, Ocean Systems
Ultra Electronics, Sonar and Communications

UK Hydrographic Office

Varivane

Vickers PLC

Vickers Propulsion Technology UK

Vosper Thornycroft (UK) Ltd.

Worcester Controls

Yarrows Shipbuilders

This list is subject to change as some of the events are still some way off. Companies participating in defence industry events on-board RN ships make a contribution towards the cost.

In addition to these defence-related companies, a number of other UK non-defence-related companies will be mounting commercial events in various locations, to coincide with Ocean Wave ship visits.

Albanian Military Personnel (Visits)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Albanian military personnel who have visited the United Kingdom since 1992. [16405]

Mr. Soames: The Albanian Minister of Defence, Mr. Safet Zhulali, visited the United Kingdom in 1995, accompanied by three military officers. Eleven representatives of the Albanian Ministry of Defence have been identified as having attended seminars or training courses in the United Kingdom under MOD auspices since 1992. It is not currently our practice to make public the names of such visitors, though as announced on 28 January by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, *Official Report*, columns *140–41*, we are reviewing this.

Royal Navy

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to enhance the capability of the Royal Navy; and if he will make a statement. [16605]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 14 January to the hon. Member for Castlepoint (Dr. Spink), *Official Report*, column 223.

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department nad its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16175]

Mr. Arbuthnot: *(pursuant to his reply 19 February, column 640):* I regret that there was an error in the reply sent on behalf of the Chief Executive of the Meterological Office. I have asked the Chief Executive to write again to the hon. Member with the correct information.

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 24 February 1997:

I regret that my letter to you of 19 February contained a typographical error. The figure for 1996 at *d.* should read 12 rather than 112 weeks.

My apologies for this mistake.

Army Careers Information Offices (Yorkshire)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of each Army careers information office functioning in Yorkshire since 1990, indicating the dates on which they were open, their running costs and the total number of annual recruits. [16650]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is set out in the tables. Details of running costs are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Office	*Year opened*	
Barnsley	1975	The ACI0 closed in February 1995; it re-opened in May 1996.
Bradford	1959	
Doncaster	1961	
Halifax	1990	The ACI0 was destroyed by an IRA bomb in February 1990. The office re-located to the local TA centre.
Huddersfield	1906	
Leeds	1995	AC10 closed 1995. Now opened as a Tti-Service Armed Forces Careers Office.
Scarborough	1992	
Sheffield	1964	Shared site with the Royal Navy.
Wakefield	1958	
York	1972	

The total number of recruits annually since 1990 is:

1990–1991: 1,612

1991–1992: 1,176

1992–1993: 1,118

1993–1994: 643

1994–1995: 1,169

1995–1996: 913

1996–1997[1]: 1,231.

[1] Figure for Financial Year 1996–97 is an estimate based on performance to date.

Regimental Museums

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the outcome of his Department's review of funding for regimental museums; and if he will ensure that his Department's funding for the museum of the Royal Dragoon Guards and Prince of Wales's Own Regiment in York will be maintained in future years at a sufficient level to allow the joint museum to remain in a city centre location. [16647]

Mr. Soames: The Government are fully aware of the important contribution made by regimental and corps museums to preserving the identity, history and traditions of their associated regiments and to maintaining the public profile of the Army in many parts of the UK. Nevertheless, as part of the Government's determination to reduce expenditure in the defence support area, and to concentrate it on the front line, the contribution my

Department makes to the funding of regimental and corps museums will be reduced by a little under 13 per cent. from April 1998. We are currently consulting with museum trustees about how these adjustments should best be achieved. A panel drawn from people with wide experience in museum management is to review the allocation of funds and recommend where the savings should fall. The future funding of all museums, including the museum of the Royal Dragoon Guards and Prince of Wales's Own Regiment in York, will be considered as part of this review. It would be premature to form a view as to what impact there might be on particular museums until the panel has reported.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which *(a)* and *(b)* have attended indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16574]

Mr. Soames: Ministers attended Scottish Grand Committee meetings as part of their normal parliamentary duties and officials do so as part of their normal departmental duties. Expenditure falling to this Department has been limited to travelling costs. My right hon. Friend attended the Scottish Grand Committee meeting on 25 November 1996 in Cupar, Fife and had officials in attendance as necessary.

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the analysis of the amount of low-flying activity in each low-flying area referred to in his letter to the hon. Member of 2 August 1996. [16872]

Mr. Soames: As my noble Friend, the Under Secretary of State for Defence, advised the hon. Member in his letter of 10 January 1997, we shall publish the results as soon as practicable.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total number of daytime low-flying movements over the United Kingdom in each year between 1994 and 1996. [16823]

Mr. Soames: The numbers of daytime low-flying movements booked into the United Kingdom low flying system in each year between 1994 and 1996 are as follows:

1994: 225,101

1995: 226,315

1996: 208,646.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many night low-flying movements were booked into night low-flying area 2B in each year since 1989. [16821]

Mr. Soames: The numbers of low flying movements booked into night low flying sector 2B in each year since 1989 are as follows:

1989: 225[1]

1990: 462

1991: 290

1992: 467

1993: 427

1994: 303

1995: 651

1996: 497

[1] 1 June to 31 December. Night low flying sector 2B was established on 1 June 1989.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low-flying movements were booked into *(a)* low-flying area 13 and *(b)* low-flying area 16 in 1996. [16875]

Mr. Soames: The numbers of low-flying movements booked into low-flying areas 13 and 16 in 1996 were 4,744 and 16,896 respectively.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many night low-flying movements were booked into the Spadeadam range operating area in each year since 1989; [16801]

(2) what was the total number of night low-flying movements over the United Kingdom in each year from 1989 to 1996. [16822]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Apache Helicopters (Weapons Firing)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the locations of range facilities for practice firing of *(a)* cannon, *(b)* CRV7 and *(c)* Hellfire weapons by Apache helicopters. [16882]

Mr. Soames: No decisions have yet been taken as to the locations of range facilities for the practice firing of these weapons systems.

Army Field Training Area

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the designation, Army field training centre, came into effect; if he will list the current AFTCs and the date of designation of each; and what is the relationship between the definition of an AFTC and the former principal training area category. [16874]

Mr. Soames: The designation Army field training centre was introduced in April 1991 to reflect the increased importance of these training areas following structural reorganisation of the Army under "Options for Change". The current list of AFTCs and their designation dates is as follows:

1st April 1991: Salisbury Plain, Stanford, Cinque Ports, Otterburn, Sennybridge, Warcop.

1st April 1994: Catterick.

1st April 1995: Castlemartin.

Galloway Training Area

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many man-days of training have been conducted in the Galloway training area in each of the last five years. [16873]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number of man training days*
1992–93	11,709
1993–94	10,461
1994–95	19,302
1995–96	23,027
1996–97	[1]47,846

[1] Figures available for period April to December 1996 only; these have been calculated on a different basis from those given for the preceding years and now include training undertaken by the reserve forces, cadets and the other two services.

Nuclear Forces

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the defence budget was spent on maintaining and operating British nuclear forces in financial years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [16884]

Mr. Soames: Running costs for Trident and Polaris ballistic missile submarines constituted around 1 per cent. of the defence budget in each of financial years 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Danger Areas

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what activities are authorised in danger area D402C; and on what date the area was established. [16819]

Mr. Soames: The only activity authorised in danger area D402C is occasional bomb disposal. The danger area was brought into activity in January 1996.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many days in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996 the danger area designated EGD512A was active; if he will list the weapons which are authorised for use within EGD512A; and what is the expected change in the nature and frequency of use of EGD512A following the development of firing facilities at Otterburn. [16829]

Mr. Soames: Danger area EGD512A was in use for two days in 1995–96 and has been active for four days to date in 1996–97. All artillery gun systems are unauthorised to use the danger area. No significant change in use is anticipated.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions over the last two years *(a)* danger area D402A and *(b)* danger area D402B have been activated above 3,000 ft; to what height they were activated in each case; and what procedures are in place for the safe transit of aircraft on airway B2 when such activations take place. [16820]

Mr. Soames: Over the last two years, Danger Areas D402A and B have been activated above the normal maximum height of 3,000 ft for weapons firing trials work. Notice to Airmen—NOTAM—warnings of range activity occurred on 10 occasions covering a total period of 28 days, although four of these NOTAMs, covering a total of six days, were cancelled due to weather. Activation dates, times and maximum heights were as follows:

Date	*Time*	*Maximum Height*	
Danger Areas D402A and B—NOTAM Details	0900–1700 hours	Up to 23,000 feet	NOTAM cancelled
1 July 1995			
3 to 17 July 1995	0900–1900 hours	Up to 13,000 feet	
22 July 1995	0900–1600 hours	Up to 20,000 feet	
19 to 20 August 1995	0900–1600 hours	Up to 5,000 feet	NOTAM cancelled
2 to 3 September 1995	0930–1800 hours	Up to 23,000 feet	NOTAM cancelled
8 May 1996	1000–1400 hours	Up to 7,000 feet	
1 to 2 February 1997	1100–1500 hours	Up to 5,000 feet	
Danger Areas D402A only—Activation Details			
2 November 1996	1000–1600 hours	Up to 17,000 feet	
16 November 1996	0900–1400 hours	Up to 17,000 feet	NOTAM cancelled
18 to 19 January 1997	1200–1600 hours	Up to 5,000 feet	

When danger areas are active, Airway Blue 2 is closed by NOTAM action, although, when safe to do so, the danger area controlling authority, West Freugh approach radar, may, when requested, approve aircraft to use this airway.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the weapon types which have been authorised for discharge in *(a)* danger area D411 and *(b)* danger area D509 in the last 10 years; what records his Department collates of the number and type of weapons fired; and if he will make a statement on efforts made to recover unexploded ordnance from the seabed in these areas. [16826]

Mr. Soames: Danger area D411, in the Portpatrick area, is used for trials of Sonobuoy equipment. No weapons have been authorised for discharge in this area over the last 10 years.

Danger area D509, in the Campbletown area, is used for anti-air and surface weapon training. My Department does not hold records detailing the specific weapons authorised for discharge in danger area D509 over the last 10 years, nor are records collated indicating the number and types of weapons fired. This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the following weapon types are known to have been used routinely within this area:

7.62mm General Purpose Machine Gun and a variety of small arms

20mm ADEN air to surface cannon

20 & 30mm Oerlikon guns

40mm Bofors 40/60 guns

In addition, the following weapon types have been used on an occasional basis within danger area D509:

20mm DCN guns

20mm Giat cannon

40mm Oerlikon 40/70 guns.

As a matter of routine during training and exercises, inert projectiles would be fired by the weapons detailed above: residue deposited on the sea-bed would not, therefore, be explosive.

In accordance with our usual practice, my Department has made no effort to recover unexploded ordnance from the sea-bed in danger areas D411 and D509. As a general principle, scientific advice indicates that unexploded ordnance on the seabed presents no significant risk to safety, human health or the marine environment, if left undisturbed.

Kirkcudbright Range

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the training area category of Kirkcudbright range when it is transferred to the Army; and what plans he has to develop Kirkcudbright as an army field training centre. [16831]

Mr. Soames: The Kirkcudbright training area will be a district training asset administered by Army headquarters, Scotland. There are no plans at present to develop Kirkcudbright as an Army field training centre.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for provision of facilities for non-infantry units at the Kirkcudbright range; if he will list the types of non-infantry training to be authorised there; and on what date such training is scheduled to start. [16876]

Mr. Soames: Apart from continued use of the existing demolition area by the Royal Engineers no specific facilities will be provided for use by non-infantry units. The area will also be used by the Royal Artillery for the firing of the multiple launch rocket system. No other non-infantry training has been authorised.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the provision of infantry training facilities at the Kirkcudbright range; if he will list the type of infantry training to be authorised there; what will be the maximum number of infantry personnel using the area at any one time; and on what date infantry training is scheduled to start. [16877]

Mr. Soames: Infantry dry tactical training has been conducted at Kirkcudbright since September 1995. We now plan to develop the infantry ranges to accommodate the live firing of small arms and support weapons as well. The maximum number of infantry personnel using the range at any one time will be approximately 500.

Live Fire Training

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current arrangements for live firing training for missile-equipped helicopters in the Army Air Corps; and what assessment he has made of the advantages of combining Army Air Corps live fire training with RAF armament practice camp facilities. [16835]

Mr. Soames: Live firing training for missile equipped Army Air Corps helicopters is undertaken on Salisbury Plain training area and at Otterburn. Consideration has been given to conducting Army Air Corps live firing at RAF armament practice camps, but the conclusion reached was that this would be neither practical nor cost effective.

Military Aircraft (Flying Hours)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the total number of hours flown by each aircraft type in military service in each year since 1990; and what are the funded hours for each type in 1997. [16803]

Mr. Soames: I have placed a table detailing the available information in the Library of the House.

Inflatable Targets

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many inflatable targets were deployed to Goose bay, Canada, during the 1996 training season; to how many locations the targets were deployed; what was the total cost of *(a)* deploying *(b)* operating and *(c)* supporting the targets; what contribution to repayment of those costs will be made by (i) the Canadian authorities and (ii) other allied air forces training at Goose bay; and what conclusions have been reached concerning the future deployment of inflatable targets at Goose bay. [16808]

Mr. Soames: Six inflatable targets were deployed to Goose bay, Canada, during the 1996 training season. It is not possible to provide the cost information requested as the deployment was not undertaken as a stand alone activity and costs were, therefore, not recorded separately. As this was a national deployment, no financial contribution was sought from the Canadian authorities or other allied air forces at Goose bay. Consideration is currently being given to locating inflatable targets at Goose bay on a permanent basis to meet UK training requirements.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the *(a)* statutory and *(b)* service regulatory provisions for (i) consultations with, and (ii) notification of, owners of adjoining land when inflatable targets for simulated air-to-ground attack are deployed on private land. [16809]

Mr. Soames: The Department maintains standing instructions on the deployment of forces and equipment, including inflatable targets, on private land. These instructions are complied with at all times, and deployments are only undertaken with the prior authorisation of the land owner. Adjoining land owners are not formally notified but the local police are consulted.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations, dates of deployment and nature of the training for each deployment on private land of inflatable targets in the last five years; and if his Department holds training licence agreements with each of the locations. [16810]

Mr. Soames: Details of such deployments are not recorded centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, deployments on private land are undertaken only with the agreement of the appropriate land owner.

Training (Stranraer)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations, acreage, and types of training allowed under each training licence for ground forces training within 25 miles of Stranraer. [16811]

Mr. Soames: Within 25 miles of Stranraer, military ground forces training takes place at the Galloway training area and Castle Kennedy airfield. Only a very small percentage of the 67,617 ha of the Galloway training area lies within 25 miles of Stranraer and since 1 January 1987 use has been regulated by a licence granted by the Forestry Commission. The area is used mainly for low level tactical infantry training, orienteering, medical training, map reading, adventure training and very occasional parachute jumps.

Castle Kennedy, which extends to 370 ha, is regularised under an ongoing licence from Stair estate and is used for low level tactical infantry training, first aid, bivouacking, signals and driver training. In addition to these specific training licences, military units can apply to use other Stair estate, Forestry Commission or private land on a one off basis by separate individual agreement with the landlord concerned.

Tornado GR.1 Fleet

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the Royal Air Force Tornado GR.1 fleet are to be repainted in grey camouflage scheme; and what proportion have been repainted. [16814]

Mr. Soames: All Tornado interdictor strike—GR.1 and GR.4—aircraft are to be painted in the grey camouflage scheme at the time of their next scheduled respray. So far the new paint scheme has been applied to 41 aircraft.

Nuclear-powered Hunter-killer Submarines

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the average annual running cost of a nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarine in each of the last five years. [16815]

Mr. Soames: The average annual operating costs for Swiftsure and Trafalgar class SSNs over the period 1992–3 to 1994–5 were broadly as follows (at mid-year prices):

	Swiftsure (£ million)	*Trafalgar (£ million)*
1992–93	19.1	11.1
1993–94	18.9	13.1
1994–95	24.8	19.3

Figures for 1995–96 and 1996–97 are not available.

Nuclear Fuel Rods (Sellafield)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent in each of the last five years storing spent nuclear submarine fuel rods at Sellafield. [16817]

Mr. Soames: The cost of storage of spent submarine reactor fuel at BNFL Sellafield in each of the last five years, from 1992 to 1996 inclusive, is £0.6 million, £1.1 million, £1.6 million, £2.6 million and £2.3 million respectively.

Army Mechanised Training

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for Army mechanised training in the Spadeadam area. [16833]

Mr. Soames: It is expected that individual Army units, including mechanised units, will continue to make some limited use of the facilities at RAF Spadeadam.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates, locations and types of equipment used in deployments of electronic warfare threat simulator equipment outside the Spadeadam range boundaries since December 1994. [16818]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

Location	*Type of equipment*	*1995*	*1996*
Dumfries	Skyguard	20–21 November	—
South Wales	Skyguard	8–12 May	—
	JETS	8–12 January	—
Aberporth	Skyguard	15–21 January	—
		6–10 February	—
		13–17 March	—
Brownside	Skyguard	3–7 April	—
	JETS	18–22 September	—
	T 43	3–7 April	—
		18–22 September	—
Brunton	Skyguard	10–14 July	—
	T 43	19–20 July	—
Otterburn	Skyguard	19–21 July	1–5 September
			2–6 September
	JETS		2–6 September
	T 43	10–14 July	—

Deployments in the low flying monitoring role or for public relations are excluded from the table.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the US-owned equipment withdrawn by the United States of America, *(b)* the new US-owned equipment installed and *(c)* the new United Kingdom-owned equipment installed at the Spadeadam range over the last three years. [16824]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

(a) The US-owned equipment withdrawn consists of:

AN—MSR T4 TRAINS (Threat Reaction Analysis System); and

AN—MST—T1(V) Mini-MUTES (Multiple Threat Emitter System) systems.

(b) No new US-owned equipment has been installed.

(c) Two additional UK-owned Skyguard Radars have been declared operational.

Nimrod Aircrew

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date crew resource management training was introduced for Nimrod aircrew. [16800]

Mr. Soames: This training was introduced from 27 March 1996.

Nimrod Aircraft Crash (Canada)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for State for Defence if the air display manoeuvres carried out by the Nimrod aircraft which crashed in Canada in September 1995 had been *(a)* reviewed and *(b)* authorised by (i) the station commander of RAF Kinloss and (ii) the Nimrod standards evaluation personnel. [16828]

Mr. Soames: The Nimrod display sequence had been reviewed and authorised by both the station commander at RAF Kinloss and air officer commanding No. 18 group.

It should be noted that the accident was caused by the pilot, who made an error of judgment in modifying one of the manoeuvres after the display sequence had been authorised, and this led the aircraft to stall at a height and attitude from which recovery was impossible. Nimrod standards evaluation personnel have no responsibility for either reviewing or authorising display flying.

Kielder Forest (Training Licence Agreement)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the changes made to the training licence agreement for Kielder forest in the last five years. [16832]

Mr. Soames: The training licence at Kielder forest was last renewed in 1993 when the maximum number of major exercises permitted in any one year increased from one to three and the definition of major exercise was changed from "more than 250 men" to "more than 350 but less than 1,200 men". The maximum number of permitted days of military training and the periods during the year when training could take place, remained unchanged. The licence is currently being reviewed on similar terms and conditions.

RAF Debriefing Systems

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the impact on the locations and scheduling of air combat training of the acquisition of rangeless airborne instrumentation debriefing systems for the RAF. [16836]

Mr. Soames: The planned acquisition of the rangeless airborne instrumented debriefing system—RAIDS—is not expected in itself to generate an increase in air combat training above current levels, but would be used to debrief all forms of tactical training. However, our withdrawal from the air weapons training installation at Decimomannu, Sardinia, has been prompted in part by our decision to procure such a system and a small increase in air training conducted in UK airspace will occur as a result. As now, much of this training will be conducted over the sea.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans to acquire rangeless airborne instrumentation debriefing systems for the RAF; and if such systems will incorporate a capability to record and debrief low-level air-to-ground attacks. [16837]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the late hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 13 January 1997, *Official Report*, column *124*. It is planned that RAIDS would provide a recording and debriefing capability across the entire range of RAF fast jet training requirements, including low-level air-to-ground attacks.

Tornado Aircraft

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tests have been conduced on the visibility of Tornado aircraft in the grey camouflage scheme; and if he will make a statement. [16813]

Mr. Soames: A trial comparing the conspicuity of the Tornado aircraft in a dark camouflage grey scheme with the grey and green disruptive pattern was undertaken in 1994. Dark camouflage grey was recommended as the camouflage scheme for the Tornado GR1.

RAF Spadeadam (Aircraft Training)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if aircraft carrying out training at RAF Spadeadam at low level are permitted to carry out evasive manoeuvring to counter electronic threats ranged against them when outside the boundaries of *(a)* low flying area 13 and *(b)* Spadeadam area of intense aerial activity. [16816]

Mr. Soames: Aircraft are permitted to carry out evasive manoeuvres outside these areas, subject to normal flying regulations.

Training Areas (Definition)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the current categories of training area other than army field training centres; and if he will provide a definition of each category. [16830]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Arms training area: used primarily to meet the specialist training requirements of a particular arms branch.

(b) Major district training area: provides significant training facilities for use by all units, although priority is normally given to units located within the district divisional boundary.

(c) Minor district training area: provides facilities primarily for training at sub-unit level.

(d) Unit training area: suitable for individual and low level training and usually located within or near a unit's barracks.

Army Helicopters (Missile Firing)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the ranges and training areas where tube-launched optically steered wire guided missile firing from Army helicopters is *(a)* authorised and *(b)* conducted. [16834]

Mr. Soames: TOW missile firing from Army helicopters is authorised on the following UK ranges:

Benbecula

Cape Wrath

Castlemartin

Dartmoor

Holbeach

Otterburn

Salisbury Plain

Shoeburyness.

Of the above, TOW missile firing is at present conducted only at Cape Wrath, Otterburn and Salisbury plain.

Naval Bases (Running Costs)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average running cost of *(a)* Royal Naval Armaments Depot, Coulport and *(b)* Clyde Submarine Base, Faslane, in each of the past five years. [16812]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Naval Bases and Supply Agency. I have asked the chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Trewby to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 24 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the running costs of Royal Naval Armament Depot (RNAD) Coulport and HM Naval Base Clyde as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Naval Bases and Supply Agency.

The information requested is as follows, expressed at 1996–97 price levels:

£ million

Running costs of:	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97 forecast*
RNAD Coulport	54.119	58.797	62.010	59.372	52.005
HM Naval Base Clyde	89.322	107.465	113.219	121.544	142.745

I shall add that these figures reflect the impact of considerable changes over the last five years, which include the greater disaggregation of costs to Basic Level Budgets, the Defence Costs Studies which relocated Flag Officer Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland to HMNB Clyde, the migration of other tasks located at Rosyth to the Clyde and the reduction of the Polaris task at Coulport.

Quantock School

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many pupils are being financed by the Service Children's Education agency in years 12 and 13 at Quantock school, Taunton; and how much is being paid for each child. [16909]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* There is currently one pupil whose parents are in receipt of boarding school allowance in the sixth form at Quantock school. The cost to public funds is £2,350 per term.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, columns *125–6*, if he will set out the basis of his estimate for the total cost of the nuclear programme; and if he will list for each year the sum in 1997 prices represented by that estimate. [17051]

Mr. Soames: The estimate given by my right hon. Friend was in response to a question about Trident rather than the defence nuclear programme at large. Pursuant to that answer, and in response to the present question, procurement of the Trident system will have absorbed less than 2½ per cent. of defence spending during the years in question. It is still too early to make a detailed assessment of the operating costs of Trident but our best estimate remains some £6 billion over the life of the system.

As to future overall costs of the nuclear programme, I have decided not to disclose these under exemption 1 to the code of practice on access to Government information, which covers information whose disclosure would harm national security or defence.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency set up by his Department since the start of April 1992. [16973]

Mr. Soames: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Korean War (Medals)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British service personnel who took part in the Korean war are still waiting to be awarded a Korean war medal; and if he will make a statement. [16961]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

United States Bases

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who is responsible for determining, and what criteria govern, whether the United Kingdom Government renews the United States security of tenure at Menwith Hill station. [17381]

Mr. Soames: The Secretary of State for Defence retains the Crown freehold of RAF Menwith Hill and the site has been made available to United States authorities by Her Majesty's Government under arrangements that exist for our mutual defence. Though it is not our practice to comment on the precise details of such arrangements, I can say that there are no plans, nor is there any requirement, to renew the arrangements at RAF Menwith Hill.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Kingdom bases, occupied by United States forces in the United Kingdom, are due to have their leases or security of tenure agreements renewed *(a)* in 1997, *(b)* in the next five years and *(c)* in the next 10 years; and if he will name them. [17424]

Mr. Soames: None.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the legal status of the United States security of tenure relating to the Menwith Hill station; and if he will make a statement. [17420]

Mr. Soames: RAF Menwith Hill is made available for the use of US forces in accordance with the NATO status of forces agreement of 1951 and other administrative agreements which are confidential between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the United States of America. This includes the security of tenure arrangement which applies solely to RAF Menwith Hill.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the changes of administration at Menwith Hill station since 1967. [17439]

Mr. Soames: There has been one change in administration at RAF Menwith Hill since 1967. Executive management of RAF Menwith Hill was assumed by the US Army on 8 August 1995.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the new radomes recently built for the United Sates Air Force at RAF Feltwell, Norfolk, cost; who paid for them; what are the US Air Force's proposals in respect of a new near-space facility within this compound; and if he will make a statement. [17425]

Mr. Soames: The near space tracking facility at RAF Feltwell became operational on 30 September 1966. There are currently no plans for further expansion. The US authorities are responsible for funding infrastructure costs at the site and as such questions concerning the facility are a matter for them.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many security of tenure or lease agreements have been made with the United States Government relating to bases in the United Kingdom since 1967. [17419]

Mr. Soames: None. Bases are made available to the United States authorities by Her Majesty's Government under arrangements that exist for our mutual defence.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the US Navy will withdraw from RAF Edzell; and what alternative role and function the base will assume. [17422]

Mr. Soames: The US Navy will withdraw from RAF Edzell by summer of 1997. It is expected that the site will be offered for sale on the open market. My Department has recently appointed property agents to prepare a disposal and marketing strategy as the base has a wide range of possible alternative uses. It is therefore not known at present what alternative role and function the base will assume.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those security of tenure or lease agreements made with the United States Government relating to bases in the United Kingdom which are currently in force. [17389]

Mr. Soames: There is one security of tenure agreement applicable solely to RAF Menwith Hill. No leases have ever been granted to the US authorities.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which US Department of Defence agency employs the base commander at Menwith Hill station. [17440]

Mr. Soames: The base commander at RAF Menwith Hill is employed by the United States Army.

Prisoners of War

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to complete his review of deductions from the pay of prisoners of war; and if he will make a statement. [17501]

Mr. Soames: As I said during the debate on 15 January, *Official Report*, column 255, we hope to complete the review of deductions from the pay of officer prisoners of war and protected personnel by the end of March.

Land Mines

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *365*, if he will list the types of mines and specified conventional weapons which are prohibited or restricted by the UN protocol as amended on 3 May 1996. [17243]

Mr. Arbuthnot: In summary, amended protocol II of the UN weaponry convention contains the following relevant prohibitions and restrictions.

It prohibits the use and transfer of:

- land mines, booby-traps or other devices which are designed or of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering;
- non-detectable anti-personnel land mines;
- mines, booby-traps or other devices which employ a mechanism or device specifically designed to detonate the munition by the presence of commonly available mine detectors;
- self-deactivating mines equipped with an anti-handling device that is designed in such a manner that the anti-handling device is capable of functioning after the mine has ceased to be capable of functioning.

It places restrictions on the use and transfer of:

- land mines, including anti-personnel land mines and remotely delivered land mines.

It also places restrictions on the use of:

- booby traps;
- other devices (these are defined as "manually-emplaced munitions and devices including improvised explosive devices designed to kill, injure or damage and which are actuated manually, by remote control or automatically after a lapse of time").

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department last purchased *(a)* land mines and *(b)* related equipment. [16002]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* My Department placed an order for anti-tank mines as part of the Shielder vehicle-launched scatterable mine system in December 1995; deliveries of the system are due to begin in 1998–99. Deliveries were completed in 1996 of the multiple-launch rocket system phase 2 AT-2 rocket dispensing anti-tank mines. My Department last placed an order for anti-personnel mines in 1991.

In 1996 my Department also placed orders for a number of mine-related equipments: mine detection and clearance systems for use in Bosnia; battery packs for fuses for existing anti-tank Barmine systems; inert land mines for training purposes; and the Mineplough system for fitting to engineer tanks and main battle tanks.

Nuclear Contamination (Damages)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what claims have been made by serving military personnel, former serving personnel, civilian staff and relatives for damages in relation to nuclear contamination for each year since 1980; how many have been settled and at what cost; and how many are outstanding. [15949]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Since 1980, 365 claims for damages for nuclear contamination have been made by past and present MOD employees and their relatives. Of these claims 83 are outstanding, one has been settled for £193,000 and the remainder have been repudiated. The yearly breakdown of claims received since 1980 is as detailed:

Nuclear contamination claims received since 1980

Year	*Civilian*	*Service*	*Total*
1980	11	3	14
1981	2	14	16
1982	8	2	10
1983	11	34	45
1984	8	19	27
1985	5	4	9
1986	4	5	9
1987	4	8	12
1988	7	21	28
1989	4	7	11
1990	3	5	8
1991	14	9	23
1992	9	9	18
1993	25	7	32
1994	23	8	31
1995	34	8	42
1996	23	5	28
1997	1	1	2
Total	196	169	365

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what claims have been made by civilians against his Department for nuclear contamination for each year since 1980; how many of these have been settled and how many are outstanding; and what is the value of the *(a)* claims and *(b)* settlements. [15943]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Claims from 196 civilians and their relatives have been made since 1980. Of these, one has been settled for £193,000. Of the remaining cases, 78 are outstanding and the rest have been repudiated. Information regarding the value of the claims is not available. The yearly breakdown is as detailed.

Nuclear contamination claims received from civilians since 1980

Year	*Number*
1980	11
1981	2
1982	8
1983	11
1984	8
1985	5
1986	4
1987	4
1988	7
1989	4
1990	3
1991	14
1992	9
1993	25
1994	23
1995	34
1996	23
1997	1
Total	196

Firing Ranges (Schools)

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since 1984 the Ministry of Defence has used the Crown land and Crown development orders to enable it to construct *(a)* a school armoury and *(b)* a firing range on land used primarily for educational purposes. [15885]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Since 1984, my Department has submitted planning consultation document DoE circular 18/84 four times in respect of school armouries and 15 times in respect of firing ranges on land used primarily for educational purposes.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Local Government

15. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what consultations he has had in his role as chairman of the Cabinet Committee on local government, in respect of the proper functioning of local government. [15533]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Government published a White Paper on 4 November, setting out a programme of action to strengthen local democracy, promote local authorities' local leadership role and further improve relations between central and local government.

16. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he next intends to meet leaders of district and borough councils to discuss his responsibilities for local government. [15535]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have no such plans. Responsibility for local government lies with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for the territorial Departments.

Deregulation

17. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what efforts are being made to introduce deregulation initiatives into the rural economy. [15536]

Mr. Freeman: Many of our deregulatory measures are of benefit to the rural economy. Specific examples include deregulation of the milk and potato markets which are worth on average nearly £6 billion per annum and consultation on a proposal to allow greater flexibility in re-designating rural buildings for business rather than residential purposes.

22. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he next intends to meet leaders of British industry to discuss deregulation; and if he will make a statement. [15541]

Mr. Freeman: I regularly meet leaders of British industry to discuss how deregulation can continue to benefit business and our economy.

25. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he last met EU Ministers to discuss deregulation. [15544]

Mr. Freeman: I have regular meetings and other contacts with European Ministers to discuss and promote regulatory reform.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what arrangements are in place to ensure the periodic review of deregulation measures. [15518]

Mr. Freeman: I regularly review our deregulation programme with interested parties and welcome constructive contributions from all sources.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received on the presentation of Government policy in relation to the deregulation initiative. [15543]

Mr. Freeman: I have been pleased with the warm response to my series of deregulation seminars, the green card on business rights and the new booklet, "Cutting Red Tape". This booklet includes several case studies of individual businesses which have benefited from deregulation. Copies have been placed in the House Libraries.

Next Steps Agencies

18. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to increase the number of next steps agencies. [15537]

Mr. Bates: We have already reached the original estimate of 75 per cent. of the civil service operating on next steps lines. Preparation is in hand for launching another 14 agencies in April followed by at least another dozen over the coming year. I have placed a list in the Library.

Millennium Exhibition

19. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement concerning the financial viability of the millennium exhibition at the Greenwich peninsula site. [15538]

Mr. Freeman: The Millennium Commission has agreed an indicative budget as a basis on which a grant of £200 million could be made. The commission has a target of £150 million for sponsorship and the balance will be raised from receipts and commercial income. I have every confidence that the operating company, Millennium Central—of which I am sole shareholder—will deliver on time an exhibition of which the nation can be proud.

23. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what priorities he has given in his plans for the millennium exhibition at Greenwich to the provision of facilities for visiting the site by river. [15542]

Mr. Freeman: River-based transport forms an important part of the transport strategy for the exhibition. We expect some 14 per cent. of the visitors will want to arrive by river boat and there will be sufficient new pier capacity on the site to cope with this demand. The operating company is consulting boat operators, the Port of London authority and other river interests to ensure that the Thames is able to play its full part in the millennium exhibition experience.

Government Policy Co-ordination

20. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what new proposals he has to co-ordinate the presentation of Government policy. [15539]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I seek every opportunity to explain the benefits this country is gaining from the whole range of this Government's policies.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he plans next to meet the Minister without Portfolio to discuss the co-ordination of Government policies. [15524]

The Deputy Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is a member of the Ministerial Committee on Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy, which I chair. The committee meets on a regular basis.

Political Adviser

21. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on *(a)* the role and *(b)* the length of tenure of his political adviser. [15540]

The Deputy Prime Minister: My special adviser adds a political dimension to the advice available to me from civil servants. She also liaises with Conservative central office over any political engagements I undertake. She has been my special adviser for six years.

Corporate Governance

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what guidance he has issued to departments and non-departmental public bodies on the subject of corporate governance and the role of non-executive directors. [17079]

Mr. Freeman: Guidance on the role of non-executive directors entitled "A Guide to Non-Executive Directorships for Civil Servants" was issued by the then Office of Public Service and Science to Departments in January 1993.

General guidance on the corporate governance of non-departmental public bodies is contained in the Treasury and Office of Public Service publication "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: A Guide for Departments", substantially revised in 1996.

Revised "Guidance on Codes of Practice for Board Members of Public Bodies" was published earlier this month as an annex to the Government's White Paper "The Governance of Public Bodies: A Progress Report",

Cm 3557. The guidance covers areas such as the corporate and individual responsibilities of board members, strategic planning and control, and handling conflicts of interest.

Copies of all these documents are available in the House Libraries.

Civil Service Pay

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the average increase in rates of pay for civil servants in each year since 1989. [17124]

Mr. Freeman: The average annual increases based on a weighted average of the headline pay settlements for the main groups of staff in each year are as follows:

1989–90: 7.0 per cent.
1990–91: 8.3 per cent.
1991–92: 7.4 per cent.
1992–93: 4.1 per cent.
1993–94: 1.0 per cent.
1994–95: 2.2 per cent.
1995–96: 2.6 per cent.
1996–97: 3.2 per cent. (provisional).

From 1994–95 responsibility for determining pay was increasingly delegated to Departments and agencies and the 1996–97 figure is based solely on departmental and agency settlements.

Central Office of Information

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the cost of additional regional staff for the Central Office of Information in the *(a)* current and *(b)* next financial year; and in which offices they are located. [17239]

Mr. Freeman: The number of staff in the Central Office of Information regional offices varies from year to year in line with demand. It is therefore difficult to say with any exactitude which staff are additional and which are replacements. However, total staff numbers rose in 1996–97 from 85 to 90. They are expected to fall to 88 in 1997–98. Total salary costs for each of the years in question are:

1995–96: £2.3 million
1996–97[1]: £2.4 million
1997–98[1]: £2.4 million.

[1] Forecast.

Manpower numbers in each region (full time equivalents) are:

	1995–96	*1996–97*[1]	*1997–98*[1]
Directorate	5	5	5
Cambridge	9	10	9
London and South East	9	10	7
Newcastle	8	8	10
Manchester	12	12	12
Liverpool	1	1	1
Leeds	10	9	9
Birmingham	13	14	15
Bristol	10	11	11
Cardiff	1	1	1
Plymouth	—	1	1
Nottingham	7	8	7
Total	85	90	88

[1] Forecast.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what were the total cost of and whole-time equivalent staff numbers in the Central Office of Information in each year since 1993–94; and what are the projections for 1997–98. [17240]

Mr. Freeman: The information requested from the Central Office of Information is as follows:

	Staff numbers (whole-time equivalent)	*Cost*[1] *(£000)*
1993–94	543	15,260
1994–95	499	14,548
1995–96	456	13,607
1996–97[2]	402	20,017
1997–98[2]	300	9,900

[1] Includes early severance costs.
[2] Forecast.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 25 February 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which *(a)* and *(b)* have attended, indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16571]

Mr. Howard: No Ministers or officials from the Home Office have attended a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee.

Young Offenders

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evaluation he has made of the effectiveness of diversion schemes for young offenders. [16869]

Mr. Maclean: A recent evaluation by the Home Office of the Milton Keynes retail theft initiative, which aims to help young offenders convicted of shoplifting resist further offending, showed a reoffending rate of 3 per cent. for first-time offenders attending the scheme, compared with 35 per cent. for first-time offenders dealt with in other ways. Evaluations of motor projects and physically demanding programmes run by probation services are currently under way.

Interception of Communications

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 12 February, *Official Report,* column *215,* what foreign organisations are permitted to receive data from the UK Cellnet system under existing interception of communications agreements. [16802]

Mr. Howard: The United Kingdom is not a signatory to any international agreements expressly providing for material obtained by the interception of communications to be passed to foreign organisations. On occasion, overseas law enforcement agencies may apply, through Interpol, for information concerning the subscriber to a particular telephone number, and requests may be received from overseas prosecuting or judicial authorities for data to be used in evidence, in which case an application may be made to a court for it to be produced under the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990.

The response by network operators to requests for data by foreign organisations is governed by their obligations regarding customer confidentiality under the Data Protection Act 1984, the Telecommunications Act 1984 and the terms of their operating licences.

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of the waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16417]

Mr. Howard: My Department is committed to using the resources entrusted to it to secure best value for money at the least possible cost to the environment. The "Home Office Green Housekeeping Strategy", published in August 1993, requires that property managers carry out an annual audit against environmental objectives which include waste management. Home Office waste management initiatives currently focus mainly on the recycling of paper, aluminium cans and toner cartridges.

Environmental guidance material promulgated to the Department's property managers has included the Environmental Agency's "Do-it-Yourself Environmental Performance Checklist", a draft of which was distributed on 9 August 1996, and the Department of the Environment's "Waste Guide", circulated on 4 November 1996.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings which his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16275]

Mr. Howard: No central assessment has been made of the presence of hazardous or ozone-depleting substances within the buildings occupied by my Department. However, in accordance with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 and asbestos regulations, all managers are required to ensure that appropriate records of hazardous substances are maintained in buildings for which they are responsible. The Home Office continues to provide relevant training for this. Similarly, the Home Office's green housekeeping strategy requires local managers to be alert to the existence of ozone-depleting substances and to any opportunity of phasing these out.

African National Congress (Office Bombing)

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the progress of the police investigation into the bombing of the London office of the African National Congress in 1982. [16456]

Mr. Howard: I understand that the investigation is continuing. This has included interviews with a large number of people in South Africa, and is taking account of the disclosures which continue to be made in South Africa. When it is possible to conclude the police

investigation, the Crown Prosecution Service will complete its own review of the evidence and advise the police accordingly.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Brian David Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect on the level of street crime in south-east Staffordshire of the introduction of closed circuit television in Tamworth. [17198]

Mr. Maclean: Information from the local police indicates that, since the introduction of closed circuit television in Tamworth on 1 January 1996, there has been a 15 per cent. reduction in offences of robbery, and reductions of 59 per cent. in thefts from, and 34 per cent in thefts of, motor vehicles. Overall, crime in the area covered by the cameras has fallen by 29 per cent. Furthermore, overall recorded crime for the whole police sub-division fell by 17 per cent. in 1996 compared with the previous year.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what analysis he has made of the success of the introduction of closed circuit television in reducing street crime in south-east Staffordshire relative to other west midlands areas. [17199]

Mr. Maclean: None. Data are not collected in a format which would enable such an analysis to be made.

Deaths in Custody

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is the policy of the Metropolitan police to make available (i) all relevant information which they have and (ii) the relevant Police Complaints Authority report to *(a)* the coroner conducting an inquest into a death in police custody and *(b)* the next of kin of the deceased person; in what circumstances such documents are not made available; and if he will make a statement. [17053]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the Metropolitan police make all relevant information available, including the Police Complaints Authority report, to the coroner for use at a public inquest into a death in police custody. The investigating officer does not have authority to disclose any documentation or evidential material to the next of kin without the direction of the coroner. However, I understand that the investigating officer will attempt to liaise informally with the next of kin or their legal representatives to keep them informed of the progress of the investigation.

Electoral Fraud Prevention

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans the Government have to review the format of the absent voter forms to prevent fraud and misappropriation of proxy votes; [17137]

(2) if he will instruct his Department to collate centrally the number of proxy votes at the next general election; [17135]

(3) what steps are being taken to monitor the exercising of proxy votes in local government elections; [17139]

(4) what systems are in place to monitor the number of people claiming proxy votes in elections; and if he will make a statement; [17138]

(5) if he will ensure the central collection of statistics on the use of proxy votes at local government elections. [17140]

Mr. Sackville: Absent voting application forms were amended in 1994 to ensure that electors indicate clearly whether they are applying to vote by post or proxy, and to ensure that all appointments of a proxy are signed by the elector. These amendments help to prevent fraud. The number of proxies appointed to vote by constituency in the general election will be published in the booklet "Election Expenses", printed by the Stationery Office after the election on the order of the House. Information relating to proxy voting at local government elections is not collected centrally, and there are no plans to do so.

Arrests and Charges

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* arrests and *(b)* charges were made by police forces in England and Wales in each of the past five years. [17119]

Mr. Maclean: Information on the number of arrests is given in the table. Data on the number of persons charged are not collected centrally. However, prosecution data are published in the Command Paper "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1995"—table 6A refers. Copies are in the Library.

Number of persons arrested

England and Wales

Year	*Number*
1991	1,729,121
1992	1,733,081
1993	1,702,101
1994	1,747,804
1995	1,708,851

Sexual Violence

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what resources are being provided annually for tackling the causes of sexual violence; and if he will make a statement; [16634]

(2) if he will make it his policy to implement a national strategy to combat male sexual violence; [16635]

(3) if he will provide financial assistance to the zero tolerance of sexual violence towards women media campaign; and if he will make a statement; [16636]

(4) if he will set up an interdepartmental group on sexual violence against women and children to work in parallel with the interdepartmental group on domestic violence; and if he will make a statement; [16637]

(5) what proposals he has to ensure the long-term funding of a national network of community-based women's centres providing advice and counselling to the victims of rape and incest; and if he will make a statement. [16658]

Mr. Maclean: Substantial efforts are being devoted to tackling sexual offending in all its forms. The Government's current strategy includes: keeping regularly under review the robust framework of criminal offences which already exists, and moving as necessary to address new problems, for example, stalking; ensuring that the most serious repeat sexual and violent offenders receive life sentences, so that they are not released until it appears safe to do so; reviewing the maximum penalties currently available for sexual offences, with a view to ensuring that these remain adequate for dealing with the most serious instances; strengthening the powers of the police to monitor the movements of sex offenders, and their ability to prevent and detect sex offending; a vigorous crime prevention programme; the development of treatment programmes to help violent offenders, equivalent to the sex offender treatment programmes which have already been running for some time; a study of the reasons for low conviction rates in rape causes.

Because this strategy consists of a range of different activities, often undertaken alongside other duties, by central Government, the criminal justice agencies, the social services, and the voluntary sector, it is not possible to give any meaningful estimate of the total resources devoted to this area.

The remit of the interdepartmental group on domestic violence includes all instances of sexual violence that take place in a domestic setting, and we have no plans for any additional interdepartmental groups.

The Government are also committed to helping the victims of sexual violence. We provide substantial funding—£11.682 million in 1996-97—to the national voluntary organisation Victim Support, which provides practical help and emotional support to all victims of crime and their families.

There are no plans to fund a national support network specifically to help victims of rape and incest. The zero tolerance campaign, which was launched in Edinburgh, is a local rather than a Government project, although it received some initial financial support from Edinburgh safer cities project, which was then funded by the Scottish Office: there are no plans to make further Government funds available. Where the need arises, we initiate our own national campaigns, such as the domestic violence campaign, which was launched in 1994, and publications such as the "Practical Guide to Crime Prevention".

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the criminal justice compensation scheme tariff system to give greater weight to the long-term emotional trauma suffered by women who are the victims of rape and sexual assault. [16657]

Mr. Maclean: We have made clear previously our intention to review the tariff of awards after three years.

The present tariff was derived from examination of 20,000 awards made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. It broadly reflects. Therefore, the level of damages payable under common law damages. The tariff awards for rape and sexual assault accordingly already include a significant element for the long-term trauma suffered by victims. Where, however, the mental injury is serious and permanent, the tariff provides for £20,000 to be paid. In addition, if there are consequences for the victim's earning capacity and/or cost of medical care, additional compensation may be considered.

Paedophiles and Sex Offenders

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *267*, how many names are contained on each of the lists relating to *(a)* paedophiles and *(b)* sex offenders. [17437]

Mr. Maclean: The National Criminal Intelligence Service paedophile intelligence database contains details of approximately 25,000 known or suspected paedophiles.

Numbers of convicted and alleged paedophiles and sex offenders held on the Phoenix database, the microfiche collection of national criminal records, the consultancy service index and "List 99" cannot be identified separately.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the response from the Association of Chief Police Officers on the question of public disclosure of information on sex offenders. [17797]

Mr. Maclean: I have today placed a copy of the response in the Library.

Jersey

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the performance of the Lieutenant Governor of Jersey; and what recent representations he has received on his performance. [17529]

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State has this month received representations from the hon. Member for Great Grimsby. We have full confidence in the Lieutenant Governor of Jersey.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he gave permission for correspondence with his Department relating to the conduct of Senator Stuart Syzret to be published in full by the Jersey states. [17530]

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. and learned Friend has no objection to this correspondence being referred to in a report to the states of Jersey.

Roisin McAliskey

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors underlay the decision to transfer Roisin McAliskey from Northern Ireland to Holloway prison; how many applications for bail have been made on her behalf since she has been in Holloway prison; what representations he has received concerning Ms McAliskey being returned to Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [17627]

Mr. Kirkhope: Roisin McAliskey was arrested in Belfast on the basis of a provisional arrest warrant issued by Bow Street magistrates court on 25 November under section 8 of the Extradition Act 1989. That Act makes no provision for a separate jurisdiction for Northern Ireland.

The court of committal under section 9 of the Extradition Act can remand a person in custody only to a prison in England or Wales.

Applications for bail on Roisin McAliskey's behalf were made in hearings at Bow Street magistrates court on 4, 13 and 20 December 1996, and on 3 and 16 January 1997.

Several inquiries have been received regarding the possibility of her transfer to prison in Northern Ireland: the powers under which she is detained allow only for her detention in England and Wales.

Recharging Procedures

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the advantages of changing the law to provide that a person may be charged with the same offence if the previous court case in respect of the same offence had not proceeded to the conclusion and a jury's decision; and if he will make a statement. [17404]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The law provides that a person cannot be tried for a crime in respect of which he has either been previously convicted or acquitted or could have been convicted on some previous indictment. Its purpose is to provide protection for individuals against repeated prosecutions for the same offence.

However, a defendant may be prosecuted for the same offence in certain circumstances where previous proceedings have not been concluded: where the accused is discharged at committal proceedings; if the indictment has been quashed following a motion to quash; where the prosecution withdraws the summons in the magistrates court before the accused had pleaded; where an information is dismissed because the prosecutor did not appear before the magistrates court or where the information was so faulty in form and content that the accused could never have been in jeopardy of being convicted on it; where the prosecution serves a notice of discontinuance and if the jury was discharged from giving a verdict.

Following the recent abandonment of the Whitemoor trial, my right hon. and learned Friend announced on 24 January that he was giving serious consideration to the possibility of legislation to provide for a review on appeal of decisions which bring a case to a final conclusion contrary to the submission of the prosecutor.

Police Informants

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what disciplinary action has been instituted against individual officers of the Metropolitan police force and the immigration service in relation to the use of Jamaican nationals as informants. [17153]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that no discipline cases have been brought against Metropolitan police officers. The immigration service has taken disciplinary action in respect of one immigration officer following an internal inquiry.

TREASURY

Income Support

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the gross and net disposable average income for a family of two adults and two dependent children including one earner; and what was the combined average income entitlement to income support of such a family in Bristol, and in Great Britain, for each year since 1987. [15397]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Jean Corston, dated 25 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on gross and net disposable average income of a family.

Data from the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) for the average gross normal weekly household income and average net disposable household income in 1993, 1994–95 and 1995–96 for Great Britain are shown below in current prices. Data for earlier years could only be provided at a disproportionate cost. The FES is not designed to provide for areas smaller than standard statistical regions, so data for Bristol are not available.

The FES records receipt of income support, not entitlement. I am advised by DSS statisticians that it is not possible to produce meaningful comparable figures for average income support entitlement. In the particular case of a family consisting of two married or cohabiting adults with two dependent children, there would be no entitlement to income support if one of the adults were working for 16 hours or more.

Average weekly household income of households consisting of one man, one woman and two dependent children where there is one person who is self employed or a full-time employee

Great Britain

	Gross income £	*Net disposable income* £
1993	517	405
1994–95	529	411
1995–96	520	401

The figures are subject to sampling variations (which could affect the estimates by up to £30 either way); and have been rounded to the nearest pound.

Government Borrowing (Scotland)

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *681*, what are the projected figures of the Scottish general Government borrowing requirement for each year between 1997–98 and 2001–02. [15688]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* Forecasts of the Scottish borrowing requirement are not available.

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the minimum age requirements his Department is responsible for enforcing. [15910]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I am aware of no minimum age requirements which are enforced by the Chancellor's departments.

Pension Plans

Mr. Olner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the savings which would accrue in the current year from reduced expenditure on tax relief paid on contributions made to appropriate personal pensions if *(a)* all and *(b)* half of those earning under £10,000 per annum who are currently opted out of the state earnings-related pensions scheme into APPs were to rejoin SERPS. [15590]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* The yield from reduced expenditure on tax relief for minimum contributions from the national insurance fund to appropriate personal pensions would be about £30 million for 1996–97 if all holders of APPs with earnings of under £10,000 per annum were to rejoin SERPS, and about half that amount if half of those were to rejoin SERPS.

Distraint

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what powers the Commissioners of Taxes have to take a person's money, goods or chattels without a court order. [16104]

Mr. Jack: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to powers available to the Commissioners of Inland Revenue—the board. The Inland Revenue is able to take tax defaulters' goods or chattels without a court order under its statutory powers of distraint. This is one of the legal processes available to the Inland Revenue to enable it to secure payment of outstanding taxes. Before taking distraint action for the amounts due, the taxpayer will have been sent a final demand giving warning of proceedings, as well as earlier written demands. In addition, the collector of taxes will in most cases have tried to make contact either by telephone or by a personal visit.

Income Tax (European Union)

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the highest rate of income tax currently levied for each member country of the European Union; and at what level of income, in sterling equivalents, it becomes operative. [16433]

Mr. Jack: The information requested is provided in the table.

EU member state	*Highest rate of income tax per cent.*	*Level of income at which it becomes operative in £ sterling*
Austria	50	32,184
Belgium	55	41,818
Denmark	62	18,021
Finland	54–59	30,114
France	56.8	27,503
Germany	53	37,165
Greece	45	45,872
Republic of Ireland	48	9,564
Italy	51	122,399
Luxembourg	50	22,325
Netherlands	60	28,199
Portugal	40	30,798
Spain	56	52,964
Sweden	56	13,413
United Kingdom	40	25,501

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16430]

Mrs. Angela Knight: An environmental assessment using the Building Research Establishment "tool kit" has been carried out at the offices occupied by HM Treasury at Allington Towers in Victoria with a view to accreditation under ISO 14001. Officials are now considering the recommendations and ways of taking this forward. Extending the assessment to the main building in Parliament street—government offices, Great George street—will not be cost effective, given the proposed redevelopment and the short time we expect to remain in the building in its current configuration. The proposed redevelopment project places an obligation on the private sector partner to ensure that an "excellent" rating under the Building Research Establishment's environmental assessment method system is obtained. We intend to obtain a BREEAM rating for waste management once we reoccupy.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings which his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16283]

Mrs. Angela Knight: All known asbestos is recorded in an asbestos register and Control of Substances Hazardous to Health—COSHH—registers, and data sheets are also held. Regular health and safety inspections, audits and tours are carried out to ensure compliance with COSHH regulations. All halon fire extinguishers have been replaced and regular checks for chlorofluorocarbon leakage detection are carried out on relevant departmental equipment.

Unemployment Statistics

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will use the labour force survey as the basis for unemployment statistics. [16662]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Estimates from the labour force survey on the internationally standard International Labour Organisation definition have been published by the Government on a quarterly basis since 1992—since April 1996 by the Office for National Statistics—and are

widely used for economic assessment along with the published monthly count of claimants of unemployment-related benefits.

Profit-related Pay Schemes

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *733*, what is the total tax relief granted in respect of the profit-related pay schemes notified to the Inland Revenue *(a)* between September 1996 and the end of January 1997, *(b)* in 1996, *(c)* in 1995 and *(d)* in 1994. [17201]

Mr. Jack: The available information is in the table. This is based on the estimated total amount of profit-related pay which will be received for a profit period by participating employees in each scheme. The information is supplied on the application forms submitted by employers registering their schemes.

Schemes registered in:	*Estimated cost of income tax relief £ million*
1 September 1996 to 31 January 1997	1,100
1996	1,650
1995	1,000
1994	550

[1] These figures are tentative and subject to a wide margin of error.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the proportion of *(a)* lone parents and *(b)* married women who are currently in work. [15749]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. David Clelland, dated 25 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the proportion of lone parents and married mothers who are in employment.

The estimates available for Great Britain from the summer 1996 Labour Force Survey are shown in the table below.

Employment rate[1] for lone parents and married/cohabiting women with dependent children[2] (Great Britain, Summer 1996)

	Per cent.
All lone parents	42.3
Male lone parents	51.0
Female lone parents	41.4
Married/cohabiting mothers	66.4

Notes:

[1] Those in employment as a percentage of all those in the relevant population.

[2] Children aged 0–15 and 16–18 year olds in full-time education.

Source:

ONS, Labour Force Survey.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much mortgage interest relief at source cost in Scotland in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and what is his estimate of the cost in 1996; and what is his estimate of the cost in 1996–97. [17224]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The cost of mortgage interest tax relief in Scotland was estimated to be £260 million in 1995–96. The amount of relief given through MIRAS—mortgage interest relief at source—was £250 million in 1994–95 and £190 million in 1995–96.

These estimates are based on the regional distribution of the cost of mortgage interest relief from analyses of family expenditure surveys up to 1994. The estimates for 1995–96 are projections based on applying the same regional distribution as in 1994–95 to the total figure for 1995–96. It is not possible to provide reliable estimates below United Kingdom level for 1996–97.

Fraud

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number and value of fraud cases within *(a)* Government Departments, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies reported to the Treasury in each of the last five years. [17644]

Mr. Jack: The number of value of fraud cases within Departments, agencies and non-departmental public bodies reported to the Treasury in the last five years are:

Year	*Number of cases*	*Total value £*
1991–92	287	1,536,900
1992–93	302	2,108,900
1993–94	352	1,688,500
1994–95	408	2,124,700
1995–96	480	2,848,700

The data are provided by Departments in line with the requirements of chapter 37 of "Government Accounting" and cover frauds and suspected frauds committed by departmental and agency staff, including cases where staff have colluded with outsiders. The data include NDPB staff frauds where these have been reported by departments. However, complete data on frauds in NDPBs are not held centrally, nor are the data held centrally kept in a form which distinguishes between Departments and agencies. Copies of the Treasury's 1995–96 fraud report were placed in the Library of the House at the same time it was circulated to Departments.

Privatisation (Administration Costs)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the administration costs for the share offers relating to each privatisation since 1979 broken down by *(a)* selling and other commissions, *(b)* marketing, *(c)* receiving bank costs, *(d)* advisers' fees, *(e)* underwriting and *(f)* other costs; and in each case what was the total cost. [17643]

Mr. Jack: The costs of individual sales are included in National Audit Office reports on particular sales. Published reports are available in the Library of the

House. In addition, I refer to the replies given to the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) on 23 March 1995, *Official Report*, columns *287–88*, and on 16 May 1995, *Official Report*, columns *107–108*, which contain available information on costs for the major sales. Costs for subsequent major share sales are:

£ million

	Commissions and fees	*Marketing costs and printing*	*Receiving banks and logistics*	*Advisers*	*Total*
British Coal (1995)	[1]—	0.6	2.4	[1]34	37
Genco2 (1995)	29	15	9	4	57

[1] Costs here are included in the figure for advisers.

The estimated costs for the Railtrack sale were given in reply to a question from the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on 4 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *1429*. The costs of the sale of British Energy will be reported to Parliament in the normal way in due course.

This information relates to major privatisations. Information on all smaller sales is not collated centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Invoices

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many invoices owed by Government Departments to his Department have been lost in each of the last five years; and what has been the annual sum of money involved. [17523]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury keeps records only of duplicate invoices that have been raised. Duplicates are raised where invoices have been mislaid, lost, are unreadable or have in some way been mutilated; it does not subdivide its records into these categories. The following breakdown shows the number of duplicate invoices raised in the years in question:

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Duplicates raised	1	9	40	9	[1]Nil
Value for year	£335	£8,820	£39,143	£20,017	£0

[1] To date.

Single Premium Investment Insurance Bonds

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change the rules on the taxation of single premium investment insurance bonds; if he will estimate the yield of such a tax; and if he will make a statement. [17531]

Mr. Jack: The Government have no present plans to change the rules on the taxation of single premium investment insurance bonds. In November 1996 the Inland Revenue published a consultation paper containing a package of proposals, including draft clauses, for reforming the way a policy holder's profits from all kinds of long-term life insurances are taxed. No decisions will be taken until after the response to this public consultation has been fully considered and evaluated.

Young People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the percentage of 18 to 24-year-olds who are *(a)* full-time students, *(b)* in employment, *(c)* unemployed and *(d)* in other categories in (i) United Kingdom, (ii) France and (iii) Germany at the latest date for which information is available. [16779]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 25 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the economic and educational status of 18-24 year olds in the United Kingdom, France and Germany.

The attached table gives estimates form the Labour Force Survey for the United Kingdom for spring 1996. Please note that full-time students can be employed, unemployed or economically inactive.

Comparisons between European Union countries are published in the annual Eurostat publication *Labour Force Survey Results*. The latest edition is for 1995. Breakdowns by age are given for employment on table 18, unemployment on table 20 and economically inactive on table 22. Table 24 gives rates of participation in education for young people. Unfortunately the tables do not give the precise age group you have specified. This Eurostat publication is available in the House of Commons Library.

Percentage of 18–24 year olds by economic and educational status (UK, Spring 1996)

	All persons of whom:	*Full time student*	*Not full time student*
All persons of whom:	100.0	23.6	76.4
In employment	64.7	8.3	56.4
ILO unemployed	10.5	0.9	9.7
Inactive	24.8	14.4	10.3

Source
ONS, Labour Force Survey.

Income and Expenditure

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what are the latest available figures for consumer expenditure per head in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the United Kingdom; [17090]

(2) what are the latest available figures for GDP per head in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the United Kingdom; [17089]

(3) what are the latest available figures for personal disposable income per head in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the United Kingdom. [17091]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Sir Wyn Roberts, dated 25 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent questions on the latest available figures for consumers' expenditure, personal disposable income and GDP per head for Wales and the United Kingdom.

The latest information available on consumers' expenditure and personal disposable income per head relates to 1994 and was published in the May 1996 issue of Economic Trends. Estimates for 1995 are expected to be published in the June 1997 edition of Economic Trends.

The latest available figures for GDP per head are for 1995, and were published in January/February 1997 issue of Economic Trends.

Please note that the consumers' expenditure and personal income figures are consistent with the UK estimates published in the 1995 Blue Book, whilst the later GDP estimates are consistent with the 1996 Blue Book. GDP figures consistent with the 1995 Blue Book were published in the March 1996 edition of Economic Trends.

Both Economic Trends and the Blue Book are available in the House of Commons Library.

Unemployment-related Benefit

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) of 14 January, *Official Report*, columns *202–203*, if he will express the number of people who have made at least one claim for unemployment-related benefits since April 1992 as a percentage of the working age population. [17429]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 25 January 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent question asking how many people have experienced at least one spell of claimant unemployment since April 1992, and express this as a percentage of the working age population.

Between 1 April 1992 and 9 January 1997, an estimated 10,225,000 claimants in Great Britain experienced at least one spell of claimant unemployment. This represents approximately 27 per cent. of the population who were of working age at sometime over the period.

TRANSPORT

Air Traffic Control

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to make an announcement about the preferred bidder for the construction of the new Scottish centre air traffic control facility; when he expects it to become fully operational; and if he will make a statement. [17449]

Mr. Bowis: An announcement is intended to be made soon.

The current expectation is that the centre will become operational in 2001. However, the timetable for the project will have to be finalised as part of the contract negotiations.

M25 (Widening)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what contracts have been let in respect of works relating to, or implementing the proposal to widen the M25 to 10 and 12 lanes between junctions 12 and 15; and if he will make a statement; [17639]

(2) when he will respond to the objections lodged during summer 1996 to his plans to widen the M25 to 10 and 12 lanes between junctions 12 and 15; and if he will make a statement; [17641]

(3) how many hon. Members representing constituencies in Surrey have objected to his proposals to widen the M25 to 10 and 12 lanes between junctions 12 and 15; [17638]

(4) what plans he has to let contracts before 22 May in respect of works relating to, or implementing, the proposal to widen the M25 to 10 and 12 lanes between junctions 12 and 15; and if he will make a statement. [17640]

Mr. Watts: No contracts have been let for the widening of the M25 between junctions 12 and 15 and there are no plans to let any such contracts before 22 May.

Representations received following publication of the environmental statement for the scheme are under consideration and an announcement will be made by the Secretary of State in due course. No hon. Member representing a constituency in Surrey has objected formally to the widening proposals.

Bus Working Group

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the work programmes of the four sub-groups of the bus working group. [17077]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* Three sub-groups are currently taking forward the work of the bus working group. The main items which have been considered at recent meetings, and which will be pursued in further discussions as appropriate, are as follows:

Service provision and quality sub-group: the development of quality partnerships between bus operators and local authorities; strengthening the requirement for operators to demonstrate adequate financial standing; bus headway spacing; amendments to the five-minute rule on changes to registered timetables; encouraging good practice in handling customer complaints, and taking further steps to give a higher profile to bus services and encourage bus use.

Passenger information sub-group: the development of a "practitioners' manual" on good practice on passenger information to follow up the publication last September of "Better Information for Bus Passengers"; provision of national and local contact points for information on bus services and developments in transport telematics.

Bus priority sub-group: updating and revising the guidance to local authorities on bus priority measures; "Keeping Buses Moving", the revised version, will be published shortly.

The sub-group on vehicle quality completed its work programme for the time being when it reported to the full bus working group at the end of 1995.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that the bus working group reviews the adequacy of bus operating companies' complaints procedures. [17078]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* Steps to promote good practice by bus companies in dealing with customer complaints are already under consideration by the bus working group and its service provision and quality sub-group.

Rail Franchises

Mr. Keith Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the current investment programmes of the franchised train operating companies by *(a)* value and *(b)* equipment. [15708]

Mr. Watts *[holding answers 17 February 1997]:* Rail franchisees are committed to an ambitious and extensive programme of investment both in rolling stock and in stations and other facilities. Their plans for new rolling stock investment, amounting to an estimated overall expenditure of £1.5 billion, include:

Connex South East's plans to spend up to £400 million on a modern, air conditioned fleet for services in Kent, replacing all their slam door stock during the life of the franchise.

Virgin Rail's commitment to spend an estimated £250 million to fulfil their commitment to replace Cross-Country's rolling stock fleet, and an estimated £500 million on a new fleet of tilting trains to reduce journey times on the InterCity west coast franchise.

Great Western's £50 million refurbishment programme for its high speed train fleet, and a potential £20 million development programme to increase fleet flexibility. Great Western is to invest approximately £60 million replacing the entire North West Regional Railways mark 1 fleet.

Stagecoach's planned £90 million order to replace some of the mark 1 trains in the South West Trains fleet.

Chiltern's £12 million order for three four car new diesel multiple units to operate a 100 mph express service from London to Birmingham.

National Express Group's plans to spend in the region of £40 million on a completely new fleet of rolling stock on Gatwick Express by 1999.

National Express's commitment to spend an estimated £20 million on new air-conditioned rolling stock for Midland Main Line, to run additional stopping services between London and Derby and Nottingham.

Prism's plans to spend an estimated £100 million on new rolling stock on LTS to replace its existing class 310 and 312 trains with stock.

MTL's plans to spend £30 million introducing 16 new three car electric multiple units for Regional Railways North East in West Yorkshire.

National Express plans to invest £100 million for new rolling stock for the ScotRail franchise.

In general, franchise plans commit operators to providing specified services with new rolling stock by a certain date. Whilst the procurement, cost, financing and accounting treatment of the rolling stock needed are matters for them, it is expected that the new stock will in general be leased, not purchased outright, by franchisees. The commitments on Gatwick Express, LTS and Midland main line are tied to conditional longer franchise terms. In the event of new stock not being delivered by defined dates, these franchises will revert to a seven-year term. Further details of each of the commitments referred to, including when the rolling stock is required to be in service, can be found in individual franchise agreements or plans.

In addition, franchisees have committed to over £100 million investment in station improvements, including the installation of closed circuit television, improved passenger accommodation and better disabled access.

The spending commitments given are the best present estimates, and may be subject to change. There are changes in coverage and definition from those quoted for British Rail in previous years.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Deferred Maintenance

Mr. Pike: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps the Government have taken to monitor the impact of the deferred maintenance provisions enacted under the Pensions Act 1995. [15742]

Mr. Streeter: The Department has arranged for the Court Service to record numbers of periodical payments orders made under the provisions of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, as amended by section 166 of the Pensions Act 1995, and to conduct a monitoring exercise of the terms of such orders. In addition, the Government are considering carrying out research in the summer to examine the impact of these provisions, although a fuller picture is unlikely to emerge until they have been in place for some time.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery Distributing Bodies

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will publish *(a)* the names of those (i) groups and (ii) individuals who advise the national lottery and each of its distributing bodies about applications and *(b)* their duties and terms of reference. [16537]

Mr. Sproat: The national lottery distributors consult a wide range of organisations. The main ones are: Adapt Trust, all national governing bodies of sport including the British Olympic Association, area museum councils, Cadw, Central Council for Physical Recreation, Countryside Council for Wales, Disability Action, Disability Scotland, Disability Wales, English Heritage, English Nature, PRISM fund for preservation and restoration of industrial and scientific material, local authorities, local sports councils, London Video Film Development Agency, Museums and Galleries Commission, National Library of Scotland, National Library of Wales, Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service—Natural Heritage, Northern Ireland Film Council, Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service—Built Heritage, regional arts boards, Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland, Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, Royal Fine Art Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Film Production Fund, British Film Institute, Crafts Council, British Library, Countryside Commission, Theatres Trust, Victoria and Albert Museum/Museums and Galleries Commission purchase grant fund and wildlife trusts.

The National Lottery Charities Board has a series of regional advisory panels drawn from the voluntary sector for their local knowledge. The board also uses expert advisors on their medical and social research panels, and international grants programme panel.

In addition, the distributing bodies seeks advice from a very large number of individuals or specialist firms and organisations in assessing projects or groups of projects. It would not be practical to identify and list all those, as 12,446 awards have now been made.

It is for the distributing bodies to determine the duties and the terms of reference for each particular organisation or individual concerned and these will vary accordingly to the nature of the work required.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency associated with her Department. [16966]

Mr. Sproat: My Department was not responsible for the work in establishing either of the executive agencies now associated with the Department of National Heritage. Prior to the establishment of the Department of National Heritage in April 1992, royal palaces and royal parks were the responsibility of the Department of the Environment.

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from her Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17072]

Mr. Sproat: My Department has not had any items of equipment, furniture or information technology material, stolen or unaccounted for in the last 12 months.

In respect of my agencies, one item valued at £400 has been stolen from the Royal Parks agency. Five items of IT-related furniture and equipment, valued at £1,014, have been stolen from the Historic Royal Palaces agency.

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *253*, what is the Millennium Commission's estimate of the number of visitors who will attend the exhibition; and what is the estimated total income which will be generated. [15711]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I have written to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and I will arrange for copies of my reply to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, columns 311–12, if he will list the provisions of the joint declaration and the Basic Law which envisage an elected legislative council for Hong Kong. [17527]

Mr. Hanley: Sentence 49 of the joint declaration and its annexes provides that:

> "The legislature of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall be constituted by elections".

Article 68 of the Basic Law provides that:

> "The Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall be constituted by election.
>
> "The method for forming the Legislative Council shall be specified in the light of the actual situation in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and in accordance with the principle of gradual and orderly progress. The ultimate aim is the election of all the members of the Legislative Council by universal suffrage."
>
> "The specific method for forming the Legislative Council and its procedures for voting on bills and motions are prescribed in Annex II: "Method for the Formation of the Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Its Voting Procedures."

Annex II to the Basic Law describes the planned development in the composition of the HKSAR Legislative Council in its second and third terms, progressing to election of 30 seats by functional constituency and 30 by geographic constituency through direct elections in the third term. It does not specify the level of development after the third term, but does stipulate a mechanism to enable such further development to be made.

Copies of the joint declaration and the Basic Law have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reasons the Chinese Government have given for regarding an elected legislative council for Hong Kong as contrary to the joint declaration and the Basic Law; what response the Government have made to the Chinese Government's reasons; and if he will place the communications between the two Governments on this subject in the Library. [17528]

Mr. Hanley: The Chinese Government have provided no convincing reasons for replacing the legislature elected openly and fairly in September 1995 by more than 1 million Hong Kong people with a body chosen by a hand-picked group of 400 people.

The Government gave a full account of Sino-British exchanges on representative government in Hong Kong in its White Paper, "Representative Government in Hong Kong", Cmd 2432 of February 1994.

The Government's position on the provisional legislature is set out in my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary's statement of 20 December 1996 which has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Roisin McAliskey

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from *(a)* the Government of the Irish Republic and *(b)* others about the detention at HMP Holloway of Ms Roisin McAliskey; and if he will make a statement. [17626]

Mr. Rifkind: The Irish Foreign Minister, Mr. Spring, has raised the question of Roisin McAliskey with our ambassador in Dublin. We have also received a number of representations from Irish Members of Parliament, US Congressmen and other individuals.

Government Hospitality Fund and Lancaster House

Mr Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for a prior options review of the Government hospitality fund and Lancaster house. [17798]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: In accordance with the Government's "Competing for Quality" initiative, this Department is undertaking a review of the Government hospitality fund—GHF—and Lancaster house. The review will consider:

(i) the functions and key outputs of, and the resources currently employed by, the GHF and Lancaster house;

(ii) whether these functions are necessary;

(iii) whether it would be appropriate and feasible to abolish, privatise or contract-out (with or without an in-house bid), some or all of these functions;

(iv) ways of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of GHF within the current or restructured arrangements:

(v) arrangements for departmental supervision;

and will make recommendations to Ministers.

In order to help ensure that all options are considered fully, an interdepartmental advisory group will be established. Interested parties wishing to comment on Government hospitality are invited to write by 17 March to:

Mr. D. Broad
FCO
Room 4.2.5
1 Palace street
London
SW1E 5HE

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Departmental Policies (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the effect of her Department's policies on the residents of Bournemouth since 1992, with special reference to the effects of changes in the resources provided in real terms. [14953]

Mr. Paice: The Department's policies have been aimed at supporting economic growth and improving the nation's competitiveness and quality of life by raising standards of educational achievement and skill and by promoting an efficient, effective and flexible labour market.

We are creating new opportunities and acting to raise standards for every child in Bournemouth; extending

choice and diversity throughout the education system; and ensuring that more power is in the hands of governors and parents.

Total funding for schools will increase by £833 million in 1997–98; 4.4 per cent. higher than 1996–97 levels.

The new unitary authority of Bournemouth will receive £49,533 million in 1996–97, an increase of 3.4 per cent. over last year.

Sound macro-economic policies have led to a continuous fall in unemployment over the last four years by over a million in the United Kingdom, and by 4,481 within the Bournemouth travel-to-work area.

The Department has provided funding to the Dorset training and enterprise council which has enabled them to offer a full range of training programmes and business services for the people living in Dorset. For 1996–97, the level of funding was £16 million. Dorset TEC has been successful in the modern apprenticeship programme and there are 650 young people in the county currently training to NVQ level 3 or above.

There are a number of single regeneration budget projects under way in Dorset, including a community focus scheme to develop the areas of Turlin moor in Poole and Boscombe in Bournemouth. This four-year project costing nearly £800,000 aims to raise and sustain the levels of persona, social and economic achievement of those living in these areas and to also reintegrate the two communities into the main urban economy.

GCSE Grades

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage and how many children (i) sat and (ii) obtained grades A to C for the first time in *(a)* maths and *(b)* English language GCSE in England in the latest year for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [17155]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The information is not available in the precise form requested. However, the following table shows the number and percentage of 15-year-old pupils who attempted GCSE and achieved grades A* to C in (1) mathematics and (2) English in England in 1994–95.

	Mathematics	*English*
Number attempted (thousands)	522.3	524.3
Number attempted as a percentage of 15-year-old pupils	90	91
Number achieved grades A* to C (thousands)	232.5	291.4
Number achieved grades A* to C as a percentage of 15-year-old pupils	40	50

Further Education Funding

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what date she was informed that the Further Education Funding Council intended to issue its letter to colleges dated 27 January, indicating the abolition of the demand-led element of further education funding. [17268]

Mr. Paice: On 24 January.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she had made of the impact of abolishing the demand-led element of funding on the numbers of students in further education. [17269]

Mr. Paice: The Government's spending plans are intended to provide for the continuing growth of the further education sector. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I look to the Further Education Funding Council for England to review the options open to it in consultation with the further education sector.

Skills Shortages

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, columns *266–67*, on skills shortages, if she will publish the results of her Department's monitoring of skills shortages surveys. [17649]

Mr. Paice: The results have been published in an article entitled "Skill Needs in Britain: 1996 Report" which appears on pages 73 to 76 of the February 1997 edition of "Labour Market Trends".

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, columns *266–67*, on skills shortages when *(a)* the last and *(b)* the next funded survey of employers' recruitment difficulties will be produced. [17648]

Mr. Paice: The last funded survey covering employers' difficulties was published as "Skill Needs in Britain 1996" on 15 January 1997. The next survey is expected to be published in October 1997.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Developing Countries (Aid)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current UN target for aid for developing countries; how many countries currently meet this target; and if he will make a statement. [17286]

Dr. Liam Fox: The UN target for official development assistance to developing countries, which are on part 1 of the OECD development assistance committee list, remains at 0.7 per cent. of GNP. Only four countries currently meet it: Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands and Sweden. In 1995, the United Kingdom development programme accounted for 0.28 per cent. of GNP, slightly above the average for all donors of 0.27 per cent. Among the G7, the UK provides a greater proportion of GNP than the US, Japan and Italy.

The UK exceeds the UN target of 1 per cent. of GNP for combined official and private sector flows to developing countries, providing 1.38 per cent. of GNP for such assistance—second only to the Netherlands. These substantial resource flows, coupled with the UK's record of support for international debt relief initiatives, represent a significant contribution to reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development in the world's poorest countries.

Aid Contributions

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much United Kingdom overseas aid is devoted to each of the 10 countries his Department estimates to be the poorest in the world. [17435]

Dr. Liam Fox: In 1995–96, the UK provided over £175 million in bilateral development assistance to the world's 10 poorest countries, as defined by GNP per capita in the 1996 world development report. This figure, which represents about 13 per cent. of the bilateral assistance programme, breaks down as follows—figures rounded up/down:

	£ million
Uganda	39.98
Malawi	35.71
Tanzania	29.72
Ethiopia	25.72
Mozambique	22.03
Rwanda	11.95
Sierra Leone	8.69
Burundi	0.79
Madagascar	0.64
Chad	0.11
Total	175.60

These countries also benefit from the UK's substantial contributions to the multilateral development institutions. Imputed UK share of multilateral disbursements to the countries listed totalled over £163 million in 1994, the last year for which figures are available.

ENVIRONMENT

Pollution

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the cost of incremental damage per tonne emitted of *(a)* benzene, *(b)* 1.3 butadiene, *(c)* carbon monoxide and *(d)* carbon dioxide. [17122]

Mr. Clappison: *(a)* Benzene, *(b)* 1.3 butadiene and *(c)* carbon monoxide are three of the air pollutants covered by the forthcoming UK national air quality strategy. No robust data are currently available for computing, in precise terms, the incremental damage per tonne emitted for each of the three pollutants. There has been much less work by academics on these three pollutants than for other pollutants such as sulphur dioxide and fine particles. However, a programme of work is being put in place to improve on the current information on costs and benefits, including information on incremental damage costs per tonne of pollutant emitted, for the first review of the national air quality strategy in 1999.

On *(d)* carbon dioxide, the UK has taken a very active part in the work of the intergovernmental panel on climate change. At the end of 1995, the report of the IPCC working group three was published, which reviewed and consolidated all the relevant literature on the economic and social dimensions of climate change. The marginal or incremental damages per tonne of CO_2 emitted were estimated to lie between $5 and $125. This range of marginal damage estimate is associated with an aggregated monetised damage due to climate change of 1.5 to 2 per cent. of world gross national product. There will be future work to refine these estimates.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what evaluation his Department has made of the levels of *(a)* sulphur dioxide emissions and *(b)* nitrogen oxide emissions resulting from the combustion of petroleum coke in power stations; [17189] (2) what studies his Department has *(a)* made and *(b)* commissioned into petroleum coke fuels; what assessment it has made of the environmental effects of petroleum coke burned in United States power plants; and which EU regulations cover emissions resulting from the combustion of petroleum coke. [17188]

Mr. Gummer: My Department has not made or commissioned any studies on petroleum coke burning, since regulation of such burning is the responsibility of the Environment Agency. I understand that the agency has examined National Power's recent application to carry out limited trial burning of petroleum coke at Drax power station and that, having concluded that emissions of nitrogen oxides and sulphur dioxide will be within currently authorised limits for Drax, the agency has authorised the trial. I further understand that the Environment Agency spoke with its US counterparts in deciding whether to authorise the trials, to confirm that it had properly considered all relevant issues, and that the agency will be closely monitoring the trial results from Drax.

Whilst they do not explicitly refer to petroleum coke, the EU air framework and large combustion plant directives (84/360/EC and 88/609/EC) govern the processes which involve its burning. These directives are given effect in England and Wales through the industrial pollution control regimes introduced by part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, under which the Environment Agency regulates Drax. The recently adopted directive on integrated pollution prevention and control (96/61/EC), which must be implemented in EU member states by 31 October 1999, will also govern the processes which burn petroleum coke. Once implemented, 96/61/EC will have the effect of repealing 84/360/EC.

UN Environment Programme

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) for what reasons the United Kingdom has decided to withhold its contribution to the UN Environment Programme's budget; [17222]

(2) if he will make a statement on *(a)* the matters discussed at and *(b)* the outcome of the recent annual meeting of the United Nations Environment Programme in Nairobi. [17223]

Mr. Gummer: The Government's main objective at the governing council was to secure decisions which would help to restore confidence in the United Nations Environment Programme. We believe that UNEP needs a governing structure which provides the organisation with political guidance and a mandate which gives it a clear direction. Although satisfactory decisions were reached on the budgets for 1996–97 and 1998–99, the programme of work for 1998–99, and on chemicals, oceans, and biosafety, the governing council failed to reach agreement on reform of UNEP's governing structure and on a review of its mandate. Agreement on these issues is essential if UNEP is to re-establish itself as the key environmental institution in the UN system and to reverse the sharp decline in its funding.

Satisfactory proposals on the governing structure and on UNEP's mandate were proposed by the president of the governing council and gathered a wide measure of support from developed and developing countries, but were resisted by some members of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The governing council was suspended and I took the view that we should suspend our voluntary contribution to the environment fund until these issues are resolved. The United States and Spain took the same view. The Government are now actively seeking ways of resolving this problem with EU partners, other members of the governing council and the UNEP executive director.

Drinking Water

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many prosecutions have been undertaken in the past year by the drinking water inspectorate in respect of alleged breaches by water companies of the legal standards for drinking water. [17190]

Mr. Gummer: The standards for drinking water quality in England and Wales are set in the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989, as amended. These incorporate all the requirements of the European Community directive relating to the quality of water intended for human consumption (80/778/EEC) and some national standards. Many of the health-related standards are based on lifetime exposure and generally include wide safety margins.

Compliance by the water companies with the requirements of the regulations is monitored by the drinking water inspectorate, which carries out an annual technical audit of each company. As part of the technical audit process, the inspectorate examines each water company's water quality test results for each treatment works, service reservoir and water supply zone and checks them against the standards. Each failure to meet the standards is assessed by the inspectorate. If necessary, the inspectorate will initiate enforcement action against a company and the company will provide a legally binding undertaking to carry out remedial work as quickly as possible. The inspectorate has taken more than 2,000 enforcement actions against water companies since it was formed in 1990. There is an improvement programme in place, costing over £3 billion since 1989, and at a result drinking water quality is higher than ever before. In 1995, nearly 3.2 million tests on drinking water were carried out and 99.5 per cent. of them met the standards.

Water companies can be prosecuted under section 70 of the Water Industry Act 1991 for supplying water unfit for human consumption and under regulation 28 of the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 for breaches of the regulations relating to the use of products, processes or substances in contact with drinking water. In both circumstances there is provision for a statutory defence of due diligence. Water unfit for human consumption is different from water marginally failing to meet the standards and relates to water that is unhealthy or unpalatable as a result of an incident.

Water companies are required to report to the drinking water inspectorate incidents which affect or threaten to affect adversely drinking water quality. All such incidents are investigated by the inspectorate. Most are found to be minor and there have been only a very few instances in which water unfit for human consumption may have been supplied and in most of those there were no grounds for prosecution.

In the past year, Thames Water Utilities Ltd. was prosecuted for supplying water unfit for human consumption to an area of south-west London. Previously, in 1995, Severn Trent Water Ltd. was prosecuted for supplying water unfit for human consumption and Dwr Cymru Cyfyngedig was prosecuted for an offence under regulation 28 of the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989. A prosecution of South West Water Services Ltd. for allegedly supplying water unfit for human consumption is before the court at the moment.

Organophosphates

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the environmental hazard associated with organophosphates. [16984]

Mr. Gummer: My Department has commissioned a number of research projects into the environmental impact of pesticides and veterinary medicines. This work includes consideration of organophosphate compounds and covers the development of environmental quality standards, impact on headwater streams, the transport of pesticides colloids, indirect effects on farmland birds, and the impact of sea-lice treatments on sea loch ecology. All research is evaluated during and upon completion of the work.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many pensioner households not on income support or other means-tested benefits have made use of the home energy efficiency scheme since the 75 per cent. charge was introduced; [17307]

(2) how many pensioner households have benefited from the home energy efficiency scheme since its inception. [17308]

Mr. Clappison: A total of 784,803 grants were paid to householders aged 60 or more between 1 April 1994 and 31 January 1997, the latest date for which data are available. Information is not available for the period between 1 January 1991 and 31 March 1994 because age was not then an eligibility criterion. At 31 January 1997,

2,995 grants had been paid at the 25 per cent. rate, introduced on 1 April 1996 to focus the scheme more on the most needy households.

Building Regulations (Charges)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conclusions he has reached following consultations on the proposed Building (Local Authority Charges) Regulations; and if he will make a statement. [17905]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Responses to the consultation have demonstrated marked differences of view. The local authorities are seeking significantly greater flexibility in fee setting than would be possible within the constraints imposed by the regulation-making power in the Building Act 1984. On the other hand, developers, approved inspectors and others are concerned that even the flexibility proposed in these draft regulations would not offer them sufficient safeguards.

I have therefore decided not to proceed with the making of the draft regulations on which I consulted. Instead, I propose to institute a broader review which can take account of the roles for private and public sector bodies in building control, and the consequential arrangements for paying for the services provided. Further details of this review will be announced in due course.

It is Government policy that the fees charged by local authorities for their building control work should fully cover the expenditure incurred. These fees were last revised in October 1994. In parallel with the review referred to above, I therefore propose to consult shortly on a review of these fees, any revisions from which would take effect as soon as possible thereafter.

Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on designating nitrate-sensitive areas required under the urban waste water treatment directive; and if he will make a statement. [17906]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Following advice from the Environment Agency, we have identified particular stretches of the rivers Waveney, Blackwater and Great Ouse as sensitive areas on the basis of elevated nitrate levels under the terms of the urban waste treatment directive. The Environment Agency will set nitrogen reduction requirements in the discharge consents of eight sewage treatment works which discharge into the three sensitive areas. The requirements will come into effect by the end of 1998 in accordance with the directive. I have today placed in the Library of the House a map of the three sensitive areas and a list of the eight sewage treatment works, all of which are owned by Anglian Water Services. The map and the list will also be available for inspection at the Environment Agency's headquarters and its main regional offices.

Modelling work by the Environment Agency has indicated that the eight sewage treatment works contribute less than 5 per cent. of the observed elevated nitrate levels in the three rivers. Identification of these sensitive areas implements the part of the urban waste water treatment directive which seeks to control nitrate levels in surface waters intended for the abstraction of drinking water.

The nitrogen reduction measures to be implemented under this directive will contribute to our overall aim to reduce nitrate pollution at the abstraction points on these three rivers. They will complement measures already being taken to reduce nitrate pollution from agriculture and other diffuse sources.

The effect of this package of measures in the three rivers will be influenced by the crops grown, soil type, previous agricultural practices and by local weather conditions, particularly rainfall, in each of their catchments. The Environment Agency will continue to monitor nitrate concentrations in these rivers for the purpose of identifying whether additional measures are required.

PRIME MINISTER

Government Policy (Lichfield)

8. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effects of Her Majesty's Government's policies on people and businesses in Lichfield. [15774]

The Prime Minister: The people and businesses of Lichfield are benefiting fully from the Government's policies. The UK is enjoying a stronger recovery than any other large European economy, the longest run of low inflation for nearly 50 years, and mortgage rates at their lowest levels for a generation. This year the UK is on course to have the fastest growth in the G7 group of leading industrial nations. It should come as no surprise that, in the past four years, unemployment in Lichfield has more than halved.

Albania

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Prime Minister what official gifts he has received from the Albanian President. [16475]

The Prime Minister: Gifts received by Ministers in their official capacity are dealt with in accordance with the procedures set out in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". The details are not made public.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 February. [16138]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Cardiff European Council

Mr. Forman: To ask the Prime Minister what the dates will be for the 1998 Cardiff European Council. [17887]

The Prime Minister: The dates will be 15 and 16 June 1998.

SCOTLAND

Police Officers

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many police officers there are currently per 10,000 population. [17235]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On 30 June 1996, there were 28.2 police officers per 10,000 population in Scotland.

Recorded Offences

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many recorded offences there were in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992, *(d)* 1995 and *(e)* the first six months of 1996. [17234]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* For statistical purposes the Scottish Office Home Department draws a distinction between crimes and offences. The information requested for both crimes and offences is set out in the table. Information for 1996 is not yet available.

Crimes and offences recorded by the police, Scotland

	Crimes	*Offences*
1979	346,680	327,275
1991	592,774	427,883
1992	589,562	433,896
1995	502,802	451,869

Full details of the classification of crimes and offences can be found in the annexe to the Scottish Office statistical bulletin "Recorded Crime in Scotland 1995".

Conviction Rates

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the conviction rates for *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992 and *(d)* 1995. [17236]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The number of persons with a charge proved as a percentage of the number of persons called to court in Scotland for the years 1979, 1991, 1992 and 1994 is 95 per cent., 90 per cent., and 89 per cent. respectively. Information for 1995 will be published in March.

Legal Aid

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *430*, what information the Scottish Legal Aid Board collates on the number of fee earners and fees per fee earner per firm. [16980]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The Scottish Legal Aid Board installed computer software in spring 1996 to make it possible for the solicitor acting in each case and the fees paid for each case to be identified. However, the procedure in solicitors' firms varies. In some, legal aid certificates are issued in the name of a senior partner rather than in the name of the solicitor actually handling the case. Moreover, some routine work, such as precognitions, may be handled by another solicitor in the firm. Thus, in the absence of detailed information concerning the activities of individuals, it is not possible for the board to identify accurately the earnings of "fee earners" in each case.

Mortgage Repossession Orders

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many mortgage repossession orders there were for each court district for each quarter since the first quarter of 1991. [17233]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* Figures in relation to repossession of property by mortgage lenders have been collected by the courts only since a revised system of collecting civil judicial statistics was instituted on 1 January 1994. The figures for 1994 and 1995 and provisional figures for 1996 are shown in the following tables. Not all lenders who are granted decrees actually enforce them.

Decrees granted in mortgage lender actions

	1994				*Totals*
	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	
Aberdeen	0	0	1	14	15
Airdrie	37	20	25	22	104
Alloa	0	5	1	6	12
Ayr	16	8	0	15	39
Arbroath	5	5	2	8	20
Banff	0	0	0	0	0
Campbeltown	3	2	0	2	7
Cupar	13	7	7	6	33
Dingwall	2	2	4	7	15
Dornoch	0	2	0	1	3
Dumbarton	13	11	10	11	45
Dumfries	11	4	8	3	26
Dundee	25	17	17	7	66
Dunfermline	28	28	22	17	95
Dunoon	0	3	9	3	15
Duns	1	2	0	5	8
Edinburgh	2	31	123	85	241
Elgin	8	8	5	7	28
Falkirk	24	13	7	23	67
Forfar	5	2	2	0	9
Fort William	0	0	0	0	0
Glasgow	51	125	139	159	474
Greenock	0	3	0	0	3
Haddington	23	13	13	9	58
Hamilton	7	38	30	32	107
Inverness	3	0	4	15	22
Jedburgh	3	0	3	5	11
Kilmarnock	9	9	16	54	88
Kirkcaldy	12	0	25	15	52
Kirkcudbright	1	3	1	6	11
Kirkwall	0	0	3	2	5
Lanark	0	0	0	0	0
Lerwick	1	0	1	0	2
Linlithgow	32	22	19	18	91
Lochmaddy	1	0	0	1	2
Oban	3	0	3	2	8
Paisley	51	56	41	53	201
Peebles	3	3	3	1	10
Perth	0	7	23	13	43
Peterhead	16	12	12	8	48
Portree	1	1	1	1	4
Rothesay	1	1	2	0	4
Selkirk	6	3	5	4	18
Stirling	3	11	10	9	33
Stonehaven	8	5	2	4	19
Stornoway	0	0	0	0	0
Stranraer	5	3	4	5	17
Tain	1	0	1	2	4
Wick	0	2	0	0	2
Totals	434	487	604	660	2,185

Decrees granted in mortgage lender actions

	1995				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals
Aberdeen	5	5	24	56	90
Airdrie	22	26	29	27	104
Alloa	7	9	9	11	36
Arbroath	0	3	4	0	7
Ayr	37	26	25	17	105
Banff	1	5	5	6	17
Campbeltown	1	3	2	5	11
Cupar	11	7	8	6	32
Dingwall	4	4	5	13	26
Dornoch	1	1	1	1	4
Dumbarton	36	26	36	27	125
Dumfries	16	16	10	16	58
Dundee	28	13	16	34	91
Dunfermline	24	26	39	33	122
Dunoon	5	8	1	0	14
Duns	2	1	5	2	10
Edinburgh	111	72	125	109	417
Elgin	7	9	5	9	30
Falkirk	29	29	25	25	108
Forfar	2	1	0	5	8
Fort William	4	0	0	0	4
Glasgow	155	178	176	175	684
Greenock	0	1	1	6	8
Haddington	13	5	27	18	63
Hamilton	44	60	50	67	221
Inverness	13	17	13	17	60
Jedburgh	5	6	7	2	20
Kilmarnock	43	42	50	57	192
Kirkcaldy	23	45	27	31	126
Kirkcudbright	1	2	5	3	11
Kirkwall	0	1	3	0	4
Lanark	9	12	10	16	47
Lerwick	1	0	2	1	4
Linlithgow	45	43	51	39	178
Lochmaddy	0	2	0	0	2
Oban	2	2	3	0	7
Paisley	21	36	81	78	196
Peebles	2	2	1	4	9
Perth	8	22	25	19	74
Peterhead	4	11	9	11	35
Portree	0	0	1	0	1
Rothsay	0	2	0	2	4
Selkirk	2	5	6	3	16
Stirling	6	11	11	9	37
Stonehaven	8	5	8	9	30
Stornoway	0	0	0	1	1
Stranraer	3	6	7	4	20
Tain	2	0	3	2	7
Wick	0	4	6	0	10
Totals	763	810	937	976	3,486

Decrees granted in mortgage lender actions

	1996				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals
Aberdeen	51	54	46	46	197
Airdrie	36	26	37	37	136
Alloa	13	5	7	6	31

Decrees granted in mortgage lender actions

	1996				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals
Ayr	27	15	25	28	95
Arbroath	0	0	4	10	14
Banff	5	4	3	2	14
Campbeltown	1	2	1	3	7
Cupar	18	12	14	8	52
Dingwall	3	10	1	0	14
Dornoch	0	1	0	0	1
Dumbarton	31	31	23	16	101
Dumfries	13	23	7	11	54
Dundee	41	46	40	31	158
Dunfermline	39	31	32	30	132
Dunoon	0	0	8	5	13
Duns	4	5	5	2	16
Edinburgh	133	122	139	98	492
Elgin	14	17	14	11	56
Falkirk	40	25	38	36	139
Forfar	7	10	5	5	27
Fort William	0	2	2	2	6
Glasgow	241	211	230	175	857
Greenock	16	15	14	5	50
Haddington	23	24	18	16	81
Hamilton	53	81	76	42	252
Inverness	21	16	13	10	60
Jedburgh	3	9	2	7	21
Kilmarnock	66	60	50	38	214
Kirkcaldy	40	38	36	37	151
Kirkcudbright	7	4	5	2	18
Kirkwall	5	3	4	0	12
Lanark	24	10	16	8	58
Lerwick	2	0	0	1	3
Linlithgow	71	54	37	43	205
Lochmaddy	1	2	1	3	7
Oban	8	2	2	0	12
Paisley	85	44	2	39	170
Peebles	3	1	4	2	10
Perth	33	23	29	21	106
Peterhead	17	22	15	10	64
Portree	3	2	1	2	8
Rothesay	0	0	0	2	2
Selkirk	3	5	3	4	15
Stirling	11	9	7	4	31
Stonehaven	15	11	8	5	39
Stornoway	9	2	1	1	13
Stranraer	2	8	5	5	20
Tain	4	4	4	1	13
Wick	0	0	2	0	2
Totals	1,242	1,101	1,036	870	4,249

Capital Receipts

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total and usable capital receipts for each local authority in each year since 1990. [17231]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* Total capital receipts for each local authority in the years from 1990–91 to 1995–96 are shown in the table. In those years, capital receipts were usable in full.

Total capital receipts: 1990–91 to 1995–96[1,2]

£000s

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	[3]1995–96
Total Scotland	441,153	435,542	455,690	472,843	604,744	565,035
Borders	2,650	554	2,026	912	887	2,135
Central	5,354	3,893	10,020	2,489	26,470	16,634
Dumfries and Galloway	1,487	1,473	1,333	1,632	3,049	26,471
Fife	2,023	4,404	3,664	3,343	4,167	6,048
Grampian	15,857	16,448	18,283	22,944	45,280	36,329
Highland	1,149	732	1,678	731	3,867	1,419

Total capital receipts: 1990–91 to 1995–96[1,2]

£000s

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	[3]1995–96
Lothian	6,920	11,906	10,552	10,264	25,196	9,741
Strathclyde	17,354	11,855	25,487	14,729	51,288	40,681
Tayside	5,102	7,725	3,432	3,767	5,004	2,996
Orkney	1,458	3,122	1,432	1,410	4,157	2,385
Shetland	797	1,017	1,070	1,364	3,297	1,715
Western Isles	1,458	1,518	2,128	1,860	1,421	3,998
Berwickshire	1,481	872	1,125	1,283	1,131	677
Ettrick and Lauderdale	1,083	1,126	1,411	1,271	1,408	1,034
Roxburgh	1,528	1,595	1,596	2,028	2,481	758
Tweeddale	394	466	565	928	1,545	1,618
Clackmannan	3,368	4,704	4,678	3,974	5,558	5,550
Falkirk	13,528	13,896	14,184	12,817	13,744	10,008
Stirling	7,367	8,441	10,196	10,963	10,751	13,002
Annandale and Eskdale	2,221	2,034	2,344	2,806	2,750	1,795
Nithsdale	2,123	4,213	4,638	2,833	2,808	3,197
Stewartry	706	1,010	1,127	1,479	1,609	1,121
Wigtown	1,423	1,354	2,429	2,542	2,467	2,287
Dunfermline	8,148	7,202	6,501	7,365	8,049	6,454
Kirkcaldy	7,670	7,745	8,468	7,524	7,843	7,648
North East Fife	2,529	4,150	3,024	3,489	4,343	2,620
Aberdeen	11,903	15,578	22,951	21,903	21,854	21,684
Banff and Buchan	3,445	4,563	5,834	5,502	5,583	5,105
Gordon	2,685	4,249	4,658	6,689	7,783	6,886
Kincardine and Deeside	1,790	1,990	2,978	3,566	3,048	3,571
Moray	6,492	5,083	4,620	12,604	8,329	5,392
Badenoch and Strathspey	413	815	548	1,224	851	966
Caithness	641	679	1,000	1,064	2,270	1,335
Inverness	3,847	2,816	5,078	3,557	4,259	3,583
Lochaber	1,871	1,341	2,305	2,399	2,141	1,755
Nairn	367	453	472	595	787	562
Ross and Cromarty	2,442	3,907	3,768	3,811	3,175	3,070
Skye and Lochalsh	477	479	417	730	482	581
Sutherland	410	840	884	832	1,110	658
East Lothian	7,391	8,755	8,148	8,037	18,402	5,927
Edinburgh	57,031	72,234	45,265	69,214	39,954	38,653
Midlothian	6,007	4,319	4,268	3,812	5,310	3,305
West Lothian	7,055	6,713	8,403	8,834	9,551	12,762
Argyll and Bute	3,290	4,250	4,095	4,144	5,601	4,199
Bearsden and Milngavie	2,040	1,553	976	984	865	1,057
Clydebank	7,935	5,533	6,471	4,543	3,021	1,957
Clydesdale	2,237	2,325	2,464	2,849	3,085	4,132
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	1,143	1,418	1,536	1,429	1,381	1,388
Cumnock and Doon Valley	2,063	2,078	2,584	3,103	3,745	2,930
Cunninghame	7,324	7,624	6,661	6,765	7,128	6,843
Dumbarton	5,153	3,579	5,773	5,292	6,573	4,107
East Kilbride	1,710	1,488	1,806	1,329	9,762	12,346
Eastwood	1,326	476	869	751	720	584
Glasgow	72,271	47,701	48,915	52,644	53,468	72,465
Hamilton	10,605	8,179	14,077	9,592	14,867	13,638
Inverclyde	5,720	4,894	8,925	12,539	11,215	26,572
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	4,566	4,443	4,685	4,002	4,333	4,722
Kyle and Carrick	6,939	7,377	7,734	11,173	10,698	8,360
Monklands	11,404	12,507	11,878	10,512	21,619	12,494
Motherwell	14,965	12,424	11,909	12,511	19,031	11,835
Renfrew	15,156	16,539	16,649	13,353	16,480	21,712
Strathkelvin	4,922	6,828	6,281	5,492	5,342	4,974
Angus	3,555	4,250	4,068	4,166	5,080	4,881
Dundee	20,251	14,741	14,007	12,117	15,975	11,690
Perth and Kinross	6,395	5,989	7,489	9,276	7,386	7,020
Lothian and Borders Fire	30	5	97	33	18	3
Highland and Islands Fire	8	40	23	11	3	10
Lothian and Borders Police	562	870	637	2,980	1,624	835
Northern Police	138	162	93	133	265	165

Notes:

[1] These figures cover receipts on all services, including housing.

[2] Receipts of the joint police and fire boards are provided separately. The regional totals of those areas not operating a joint board include police and fire service receipts.

[3] Figures for 1995–96 are provisional as they are still subject to audit.

Source:

Capital payment and receipts returns provided to LGF statistics unit by local authorities.

Publicity

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the total expenditure of his Department and its agencies on publicity for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1997–98; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (i) advertising and (ii) press and public relations. [14298]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 4 February 1997]:* Details of expenditure by my Department, including the agencies—Historic Scotland, Scottish Prison Service, Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency, Scottish Agricultural Science Agency, Scottish Office Pensions Agency, Student Awards Agency for Scotland—on advertising and publications for the year 1995–96, and estimated expenditure for the year 1996–97, is as follows. Publicity is defined as advertising, publications and exhibitions:

	1995–96 £
Advertising	
Fire prevention	266,000
Crime prevention	295,000
Road safety	370,000
Right to buy	168,000
Electoral registration	57,000
Organ donors	36,000
Children's panels	88,000
GP call out	129,000
NHS prescription charges	20,000
The Scottish Office	1,429,000
The Scottish Office agencies: promoting Historic Scotland properties	293,000
Total advertising expenditure by The Scottish Office and the agencies	1,722,000
Publications/exhibitions (Projects costing over £5,000)	
Crime prevention	7,180
Business rates appeals	5,800
Patients charter	5,300
"Don't make it easy for the thief"	27,840
Water and sewerage	45,100
Transitional arrangements of revaluation	9,410
Holiday crime	14,460
"Eggvert"	11,760
Neighbourhood watch	6,590
Scottish Office road safety plan	12,710
Sports policy documents	5,430
Housebreaking	5,330
School board election	6,890
Bullying	31,620
NHS annual report	23,630
"Frances the Firefly"	9,200
Fire prevention	6,260
Building control	9,810
Government expenditure and revenue	6,330
Fire action plan	22,950
Business crime reduction strategy	14,380
What to do after a death	9,810
Organ donor cards	10,250
Organ donor leaflets	27,100
Crime prevention	7,050
Holiday crime	13,670
Organ donor leaflets	24,190
NHS complaints	6,180
Family guide	21,990
Medical and dental practices complaints	8,050
Pre-school education initiative	11,600
Drugs and solvents misuse magazine	7,180
Fire action plan	14,900
Expenditure on publications/exhibitions costing over £5,000	449,950
Expenditure on publications/exhibitions under £5,000	340,690
Total expenditure on publications/exhibitions by The Scottish Office	790,640
Total expenditure on publications/exhibitions by The Scottish Office agencies (promotional/public information material)	265,290
Total publications/exhibitions expenditure	1,055,930
Summary of expenditure	
Total advertising expenditure by The Scottish Office and the agencies	1,722,000
Total publications/exhibitions expenditure	1,055,930
Total expenditure by The Scottish Office and the agencies on publicity	2,777,930

	1996–97 £
Advertising	
Fire prevention	238,000
Crime prevention	228,000
Road safety	316,000
Right to buy	228,000
Electoral registration	63,000
Organ donors	42,000
Children's panels	82,000
Food safety	536,000
Severe weather warning	118,000
Pre-school education initiative	950,000
The Scottish Office	2,801,000
The Scottish Office agencies: promoting Historic Scotland properties	279,000
Total advertising expenditure by The Scottish Office and the agencies	3,080,000
Publications/exhibitions (amounts invoiced to 28 January 1997 for projects costing over £5,000)	
Pre 5 quality	5,550
CCTV	6,690
Speedwatch	20,090
PFI	5,400
NADICS	7,250
The Scottish Office annual report	7,260
Translation, pre-school education	16,680
Art in partnership	6,920
Cot death	5,810
Diet action plan	80,660
"Teaching in Scotland" recruitment	9,880
Curriculum for pre-school children	8,840
Government expenditure and revenue	5,400
Crime prevention	6,600
NHS annual report	20,250
Violent crime	98,870
Pre-school education initiative	9,810
Expenditure on publications/exhibitions costing over £5,000	322,000
Expenditure on publications/exhibitions under £5,000	236,090
Estimated expenditure for remainder of the financial year	512,000
Total expenditure on publications/exhibitions by The Scottish Office	1,070,090

	1996–97 £
Total expenditure on publications/exhibitions by The Scottish Office agencies (promotional/public information material	232,670
Total publications/exhibitions expenditure	1,302,760
Summary of expenditure	
Total advertising expenditure by The Scottish Office and the agencies	3,080,000
Total publications/exhibitions expenditure	1,302,760
Total expenditure by The Scottish Office and the agencies on publicity	4,382,760

Running costs for the press and public relations function of the Scottish Office information directorate, the press office of Historic Scotland and the communications branch of the Scottish Prison Service are:

1995–96: £1,694,000

1996–97: £1,723,000.

The estimated expenditure by my Department, including the agencies, on publicity for 1997–98 is £4.7 million of which £3.5 million is for advertising. The estimate for the departmental running costs of the Scottish Office information directorate, the press office of Historic Scotland and the communications branch of the Scottish Prison Service is £1.645 million.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16174]

Mr. Bates: This answer covers the Cabinet Office, including the Office of Public Service and its executive agencies, and the Central Office of Information. The responsibility for using employment agencies has been delegated to line-managers. Consequently, some of the information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The details available are as follows:

1994–95

(a) the Department used Josephine Sammons Ltd., Alfred Marks, Office Angels, Parkside Recruitment, Genesis Recruitment, Wise Employment, Reed Employment Services, Professional Recruitment, Blue Arrow, Library Association, Manpower, Personnel People, Service Service, Yare Executive Services, Michael Page, Mac Recruitment, Centre Girl, and Computer People;

(b) figures not available;

(c) figures not available;

Other details are not available.

1995–96

(a) the Department used Josephine Sammons Ltd., Alfred Marks, Forrest Recruitment, Forward Recruitment, Computer People, Link Recruitment, Wilmington Agency, Hays Accountancy, Office Angels, Parkside Recruitment, Accountancy Personnel, Professional Recruitment, Blue Arrow, Robert Walters Associates, Reed Employment Services, Zenith Accountancy, Michael Page, ORS, Kelly Industrial Services, Plan Personnel, Securicor Recruitment Services, Staff Reinforcement, HMS Personnel Services, Manpower, Personnel People, Service Service, and Yare Executive Services;

(b) figures not available;

(c) the Department spent £411,795.63 on employment agencies;

Other details are not available.

1996–97 (to date)

(a) The Department used Josephine Sammons Ltd., Alfred Marks, Forrest Recruitment, Forward Recruitment, Computer People, Link Recruitment, Wilmington Agency, Office Angels, Parkside Recruitment, Genesis Recruitment, Professional Recruitment, Hays Accountancy, Robert Walters Associates, Reed Employment Services, Zenith Accountancy, Michael Page, ORS, Kelly Industrial Services, Plan Personnel, Securicor Recruitment Services, Staff Reinforcement, HMS Personnel Services, Brook Street, Connections, PSD Contracts, Chase Employment Agency, Albany Personnel, The Best Connection, Myriad Computer Services, Paragon, Manpower, and Service Service.

(b) figures not available;

(c) The Department has spent £1,081,315.09 on employment agencies;

Other details are not available.

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17075]

Mr. Bates: The information requested from Cabinet Office, its agencies and the Central Office of Information is as follows:

	Information technology equipment		*Non information technology equipment and furniture*	
	Value £	*Number of items*	*Value £*	*Number of items*
Cabinet Office and its agencies				
Stolen	[1]23,805	11	2,353	12
Unaccounted for	Nil		3,960	5
Central Office of Information				
Stolen	[2]16,193	18	78	1
Unaccounted for	188	2	171	7

[1] Includes one personal computer and modem costing £7,500.
[2] The result of a single theft of processors and memory chips.

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *492*, when he expects his analysis of new regulations introduced since 1995 will be *(a)* completed and *(b)* available. [16937]

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* During 1996 Departments introduced 388 orders which affect business. Of these, 160 were deregulatory orders which contributed to the repeal or amendment of approximately 500 existing regulations during the year.

The total number of fee and local provision orders was 130. I understand that the total number of orders which have no effect on business, such as road closure and commencement orders, was 2,903.

Also, pursuant to the answer on 17 December, I have placed in the House Libraries the latest list of over 1,000 regulations that have been repealed or amended since 1993 under the Government's deregulation initiative. I have also sent a copy to the hon. Member.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Northern Ireland Grand Committee

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many representations he has received and from whom concerning an extension of the role and powers of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee. [17125]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked about this on a number of occasions during questions on my weekly business statement.

Travel Expenses

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is his estimate of the total cost to public funds for the present financial year of travel by hon. Members *(a)* between their homes, constituencies and Parliament and *(b)* on other journeys for journeys by (i) car, (ii) rail and (iii) air. [16623]

Mr. Newton: The information as provided by the Fees Office is set out in the table.

1996–97	*Estimated cost of travel between, home, constituency and Parliament*[1]	*Estimated cost of other journeys*[2]
Car	6,283,000.00	147,000.00
Rail	993,000.00	38,000.00
Air	856,000.00	38,000.00

[1] The estimated costs for travel between Home, constituency and Parliament does not include expenditure of £40,000 in respect of public road transport and rail season tickets but includes travel within the constituency.

[2] The estimated costs of other journeys excludes estimated expenditure of £250,000 in respect of European travel which is based on travel and subsistence costs combined.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Privatisation (Utilities)

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade to what extent prices for *(a)* electricity and *(b)* gas have fallen in real terms for residential users since privatisation; and what have been the trends in prices in other EU countries over the same period. [16903]

Mr. Page: Annual average domestic electricity prices fell by 2.5 per cent. in real terms—9.5 per cent. excluding VAT—between privatisation, in 1990, and 1996. In addition, domestic customers received a discount of £50 during 1996 following the privatisation of the National Grid Company. Between privatisation, in 1986 and 1996 annual average domestic gas prices fell by 20 per cent. in real terms—26 per cent. excluding VAT. Further, domestic gas consumers in the south-west, who have switched supplier following the introduction of competition, will see additional reductions of up to 20 per cent. over the first full year of competition.

Domestic electricity prices in the UK are among the lowest in the European Union on a common sterling basis. Between 1990 and 1995, the latest year for which full data are available, the movement in real domestic electricity prices in the EU has varied from a 27 per cent. fall to a 15 per cent. increase—a 27 per cent. fall to a 9 per cent. rise excluding taxes. In this period, UK prices rose by around 0.5 per cent. but fell in 1996 by 3 per cent. Domestic gas prices in the UK were the lowest of major EU competitors in 1995, only Luxembourg and Finland had lower prices. Movements in real domestic gas prices in the EU between 1986 and 1995 have varied from a 51 per cent. fall to a 26 per cent. rise—falls of 51 to 18 per cent. excluding tax.

Detailed data including taxes are provided in the tables.

Source: Retail price index; Office for National Statistics. International Energy Agency.

Average domestic gas prices within the EU, including all taxes

Country[1]	*Pence/k Wh*[2]		*National currency/k Wh*[3] *(cash terms)*		*National currency/k Wh*[3,4] *(real terms)*		*Real change 1986–1995 (per cent.)*
	1986 (a)	*1995 (b)*	*1986 (c)*	*1995 (d)*	*1986 (e)*	*1995 (f)*	*(e) to (f)*
Finland	0.852	0.970	0.063	0.067	0.080	0.061	–23.57
Luxembourg[5]	1.763	1.625	1.154	0.756	1.254	0.658	–47.51
UK	1.433	1.791	1.433	1.791	1.818	1.493	–17.89
Netherlands	1.922	1.963	0.069	0.050	0.072	0.044	–38.08
Austria	2.773	2.507	0.620	0.399	0.686	0.337	–50.87
Ireland[5]	3.252	2.581	0.036	0.025	0.040	0.022	–44.31
Germany	2.192	2.600	0.070	0.059	0.077	0.049	–35.91
Belgium[5]	2.147	2.656	1.405	1.236	1.540	1.095	–28.87
France	2.669	2.728	0.271	0.215	0.305	0.192	–36.89
Spain	3.172	3.322	6.512	6.536	8.370	5.016	–40.08
Italy	2.041	3.635	44.611	93.456	57.862	73.12	+26.38
Denmark	2,890	3.768	0.343	0.333	0.397	0.303	–23.59

Average domestic gas prices within the EU, including all taxes

Country[1]	Pence/k Wh[2]		National currency/k Wh[3] (cash terms)		National currency/k Wh[3,4] (real terms)		Real change 1986–1995 (per cent.)
	1986 (a)	1995 (b)	1986 (c)	1995 (d)	1986 (e)	1995 (f)	(e) to (f)
Greece	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Portugal	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sweden	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Notes:
[1] Countries ranked in ascending order by 1995 price in pence/k Wh.
[2] Prices converted to pence/k Wh using average exchange rates for 1986 and 1995.
[3] Currencies used are as follows: Austria (Schillings), Belgium (Belgian Francs), Denmark (Crowns), Finland (Finnish Marks), France (French Francs), Germany (Marks), Greece (Drachmae), Ireland (Irish Pounds), Italy (Lire), Luxembourg (Luxembourg Francs), Netherlands (Guilders), Portugal (Escudos), Spain (Pesetas), Sweden (Swedish Crowns), UK (Pence).
[4] Prices have been converted to real terms by deflating national currency data (columns C and D) by each countries GDP deflator at market prices.
[5] GDP deflator not available. All items consumer price indices used to deflate to real terms instead.
n/a denotes not applicable. There is no or only very limited gas supply in Greece, Portugal and Sweden.
Source:
International Energy Agency.

Average domestic electricity prices within the EU, including all taxes

Country[1]	Pence/kWh[2]		National currency/kWh[3] (cash terms)		National currency/kWh[3,4] (cash terms)		Real change 1990–95 (per cent.)
	1990 (a)	1995 (b)	1990 (c)	1995 (d)	1990 (e)	1995 (f)	(e) to (f)
Sweden	4.934	5.984	0.520	0.674	0.520	0.568	+9.29
Finland	5.780	6.888	0.393	0.475	0.393	0.432	+9.88
Greece[5]	6.636	7.209	18.736	26.346	18.736	13.729	–26.72
UK	6.670	8.060	6.670	8.060	6.670	6.717	+0.70
Ireland[5]	7.500	8.371	0.081	0.082	0.081	0.073	–9.80
Netherlands	6.583	8.610	0.213	0.218	0.213	0.195	–8.58
Luxembourg[5]	6.965	9.267	4.140	4.310	4.140	3.754	–9.32
France	8.434	10.563	0.817	0.832	0.817	0.745	–8.82
Italy	8.809	10.723	187.90	275.70	187.90	215.73	+14.81
Austria[6]	8.745	10.882	1.770	1.900	1.770	1.641	–7.30
Portugal	8.268	11.448	20.976	27.090	20.976	18.242	–13.03
Belgium[5,6]	9.576	11.502	5.692	5.880	5.692	5.288	–7.10
Spain	10.676	12.366	19.354	24.325	19.354	18.668	–3.54
Germany	9.204	12.960	0.265	0.293	0.265	0.245	–7.56
Denmark	9.242	13.221	1.018	1.169	1.018	1.065	+4.64

Notes:
[1] Countries ranked in ascending order by 1995 price in pence/kWh.
[2] Prices converted to pence/kWh using average exchange rates for 1990 and 1995.
[3] Currencies used are as follows: Austria (Schillings), Belgium (Belgian Francs), Denmark (Crowns), Finland (Finnish Marks), France (French Francs), Germany (Marks), Greece (Drachmae), Ireland (Irish Pounds), Italy (Lire), Luxembourg (Luxembourg Francs), Netherlands (Guilders), Portugal (Escudos), Spain (Pesetas), Sweden (Swedish Crowns), UK (Pence).
[4] Prices have been converted to real terms by deflating national currency data (Columns C and D) by each country's GDP deflator at market prices.
[5] GDP deflator not available. All items consumer price indices used to deflate to real terms instead.
[6] 1995 data not available. 1994 data used instead.
Source:
International Energy Agency.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much his Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency set up by his Department since the start of April 1992. [16962]

Mr. Lang: No executive agencies have been established by my Department since 1992. The Employment Tribunals Service will be launched as an agency in 1997–98. The costs of establishing the ETS are not separately identifiable, and for the most part will be met from within existing budgets for financial and strategic planning in this area.

Companies House

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the lease on the Companies House premises in London is due to expire; what its proposed new location is; how many staff will be employed at the new location and at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [17298]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have asked the chief executive of Companies House to reply to the hon. Member direct.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Nick Harvey, dated 25 February 1997:

You recently tabled a question regarding the future of Companies House's premises in London. I have been asked to reply to you direct.

Companies House's lease on the property in City Road, London has a break at the landlord's option in December 1999. There is a requirement that parties give notice of any intention to break the lease by December 1998. Our present understanding is that the landlord will wish to exercise the break, and that we therefore need to plan to vacate the premises by then. No decisions have yet been made about a new location and the options are being reviewed as part of the planning process. We envisage that there will be at least one site in London which is readily accessible to users of Companies House services.

Decisions about premises and staffing are bound up with our plans to move to new, electronic services for our customers which will mean, eventually, that we will not need to accommodate a microfiche library in London. However, we will only take this step once we are confident that we have a satisfactory set of alternative products to offer our customers. We do expect to be in this position before the end of 1999 and that we will therefore occupy a much smaller site in London.

There were 72 permanent and 15 casual staff in the London office in March 1996 (full time equivalents); 25 of the permanent staff will reach retirement age between now and the year 2000. Our internal plans, which we have disclosed to staff and are discussing with them, include figures on possible staffing requirements once we have introduced the new technologies. However, these figures are indicative only and may well change as our plans are implemented. Our provisional planning assumption is that there will be a requirement for around 12 staff in London by the year 2000. However, I must stress that it is particularly difficult for me to be precise about the likely impact on staffing and related costs at the London office at this stage, since we have not yet established the nature of the presence which we will need in London beyond the turn of the century. One of the key uncertainties at present is how many users of our services will have switched to the on-line methods of information delivery we will be offering, and will, therefore, not need to make use of a physical presence.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Metrication Regulations (Prosecutions)

Mr. David Howell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many prosecutions have been brought against traders since October 1995 for failure to comply with metrication regulations. [17180]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Enforcement of the metrication provisions of the Weights and Measures Act 1985 and the Prices Act 1974 is the responsibility of local authority trading standards departments. To the best knowledge of the Department, there have thus far been no prosecutions of traders for failing to observe the requirements of the metrication regulations.

Assistance to Business (West Midlands)

Mr. Brian David Jenkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support his Department currently gives to businesses located in the west midlands. [17194]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Department provides a wide variety of business support measures which are available to west midlands enterprises, including regional selective assistance in assisted areas, the small firms merit award for research and technology, support for products under research, overseas trade services and subsidised services from business links.

The Department has targeted its support measures towards small and medium-sized enterprises. Increasingly these measures are being designed with and delivered through local and sectoral partnerships. This is demonstrated by the recent introduction of local competitiveness challenge and sectoral challenge schemes.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was *(a)* the number of applications made for regional selective assistance, *(b)* the number approved, *(c)* the total financial value of the approved applications and *(d)* the average time taken to process and approve the applications since 1992 in each constituency in the west midlands. [17196]

Mr. Taylor: The information requested is as follows:

Number of applications for regional selective assistance by parliamentary constituency in the West Midlands region since January 1992

Constituency	*Number of applications*
Aldridge-Brownhills	53
Birmingham Edgbaston	5
Birmingham Erdington	34
Birmingham Hall Green	3
Birmingham Hodge Hill	14
Birmingham Ladywood	81
Birmingham Northfield	8
Birmingham Perry Barr	16
Birmingham Selly Oak	14
Birmingham Small Heath	102
Birmingham Sparkbrook	65
Birmingham Yardley	37
Bromsgrove	23
Cannock and Burntwood	43
Coventry North East	32
Coventry North West	15
Coventry South East	24
Coventry South West	13
Dudley East	60
Dudley West	60
Halesowen and Stourbridge	45
Hereford	3
Ludlow	9
Meriden	10
Mid Staffordshire	5
Mid Worcestershire	44
North Warwickshire	43
Nuneaton	23
Rugby and Kenilworth	3
Solihull	10
South East Staffordshire	39
South Staffordshire	22
Stratford-on-Avon	10
Sutton Coldfield	11
The Wrekin	32
Unassigned	31
Walsall North	42
Walsall South	62
Warley East	52
Warley West	50
West Bromwich East	14
West Bromwich West	73
Wolverhampton North East	35
Wolverhampton South East	77
Wolverhampton South West	21
Wyre Forest	17
Total	1,485

Number of applications for regional selective assistance approved and the value of offers by parliamentary constituency in the West Midlands since 1 January 1992

Constituency	*Number of offers*	*Value of offers £*
Aldridge-Brownhills	39	1,235,500
Birmingham Edgbaston	5	459,500
Birmingham Erdington	22	3,474,500
Birmingham Hall Green	2	38,000
Birmingham Hodge Hill	10	6,597,000
Birmingham Ladywood	56	5,026,500
Birmingham Northfield	7	2,634,000
Birmingham Perry Barr	12	756,000
Birmingham Selly Oak	11	2,002,000
Birmingham Small Heath	79	6,120,400
Birmingham Sparkbrook	51	8,013,500
Birmingham Yardley	31	1,959,000
Bromsgrove	14	1,540,000
Cannock and Burntwood	32	1,349,100
Coventry North East	27	1,995,000
Coventry North West	12	11,246,000
Coventry South East	20	2,347,000
Coventy South West	14	575,000
Dudley East	48	2,039,500
Dudley West	53	2,054,500
Halesowen and Stourbridge	38	1,021,000
Hereford	3	57,000
Ludlow	6	785,000
Meriden	7	462,000
Mid Staffordshire	5	107,500
Mid Worcestershire	33	1,052,000
North Warwickshire	25	769,000
Nuneaton	18	3,180,000
Rugby and Kenilworth	2	1,225,000
Solihull	8	1,445,000
South East Staffordshire	29	1,628,500
South Staffordshire	18	885,500
Stratford on Avon	3	59,500
Sutton Coldfield	9	2,169,000
The Wrekin	18	2,619,000
Walsall North	32	921,000
Walsall South	47	2,345,500
Warley East	39	2,629,000
Warley West	36	3,408,500
West Bromwich East	13	762,000
West Bromwich West	51	3,546,500
Wolverhampton North East	26	5,439,000
Wolverhampton South East	64	4,824,000
Wolverhampton South West	15	2,150,000
Wyre Forest	11	617,000
Total	105,569,500	10,5569,500

Information on the average time taken to process and approve applications for regional selective assistance by parliamentary constituency in the west midlands could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The following table shows performance in the west midlands assisted area as a whole since 1 April 1996 against the speed of service targets set out in the RSA application form.

Size of application	*Working days to decide (target)*	*Number of applications decided*	*Number decided within deadline/ per cent.*	
Less than £25,000	25	71	64/71	90.14
£25,000 to £99,999	35	99	94/99	94.94
£100,000 to £249,000	45	24	21/24	87.5
£250,000 to £2 million	60	21	20/21	95.23

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the value of grants awarded to *(a)* inward investors, *(b)* existing indigenous British companies and *(c)* new indigenous companies since 1992 for each constituency in the west midlands. [17195]

Mr. Taylor: The value of regional selective assistance offers made to foreign-owned companies in the west midlands since 1 January 1992 by parliamentary constituency is as follows:

Constituency	*Value of offers £*
Aldridge-Brownhills	135,000
Birmingham Edgbaston	12,000
Birmingham Erdington	2,030,000
Birmingham Hodge Hill	260,000
Birmingham Ladywood	830,000
Birmingham Northfield	950,000
Birmingham Perry Barr	250,000
Birmingham Selly Oak	965,000
Birmingham Small Heath	2,000,000
Birmingham Sparkbrook	4,740,000
Birmingham Yardley	240,000
Cannock and Burntwood	345,000
Coventry North East	80,000
Coventry North West	8,970,000
Coventry South East	1,390,000
Coventry South West	45,000
Dudley East	315,000
Dudley West	570,000
Halesowen and Stourbridge	65,000
Ludlow	500,000
Mid Worcestershire	185,000
Nuneaton	2,250,000
Rugby and Kenilworth	1,200,000
Solihull	900,000
South East Staffordshire	1,010,000
Sutton Coldfield	1,370,000
The Wrekin	1,050,000
Walsall North	270,000
Walsall South	1,870,000
Warley East	1,040,000
Warley West	2,282,000
West Bromwich West	517,500
Wolverhampton North East	3,400,000
Wolverhampton South East	815,000
Wolverhampton South West	1,725,000
Wyre Forest	90,000
Total	44,666,500

The value of regional selective assistance offers made to UK-owned companies in the west midlands since 1 January 1992 by parliamentary constituency is as follows:

Constituency	*Value of offers £*
Aldridge-Brownhills	1,150,500
Birmingham Edgbaston	447,500
Birmingham Erdington	1,499,500
Birmingham Hall Green	20,000
Birmingham Hodge Hill	6,107,000
Birmingham Ladywood	3,932,500
Birmingham Northfield	1,684,000
Birmingham Perry Barr	506,000
Birmingham Selly Oak	1,037,000
Birmingham Small Heath	3,870,400
Birmingham Sparkbrook	3,593,500
Birmingham Yardley	1,809,000
Bromsgrove	1,525,000

Constituency	Value of offers £
Cannock and Burntwood	1,004,100
Coventry North East	1,915,000
Coventry North West	2,151,000
Coventry South East	947,000
Coventry South West	464,000
Dudley East	1,669,500
Dudley West	1,466500
Halesowen and Stourbridge	956,000
Hereford	57,000
Ludlow	285,000
Meriden	462,000
Mid Staffordshire	107,500
Mid Worcestershire	855,000
North Warwickshire	769,000
Nuneaton	930,000
Rugby and Kenilworth	25,000
Solihull	515,000
South East Staffordshire	593,500
South Staffordshire	873,500
Stratford on Avon	59,500
Sutton Coldfield	799,000
The Wrekin	1,569,000
Walsall North	646,000
Walsall South	1,280,500
Warley East	1,589,000
Warley West	1,876,500
West Bromwich East	762,000
West Bromwich West	2,454,000
Wolverhampton North East	1,946,000
Wolverhampton South East	3,762,000
Wolverhampton South West	425,000
Wyre Forest	527,000
Total	60,903,000

The value of offers to UK-owned companies in the west midlands by parliamentary constituency since 1 January 1992 includes the following in respect of start-up companies:

Constituency	Value of offers £
Aldridge-Brownhills	185,000
Birmingham Hodge Hill	7,000
Birmingham Ladywood	1,089,000
Birmingham Small Heath	132,000
Birmingham Sparkbrook	60,000
Birmingham Yardley	164,000
Bromsgrove	175,000
Cannock and Burntwood	22,000
Coventry North East	20,000
Coventry South East	17,000
Coventry South West	5,000
Dudley East	151,000
Dudley West	123,000
Halesowen and Stourbridge	34,000
Meriden	15,000
North Warwickshire	295,000
Nuneaton	499,000
Rugby and Kenilworth	25,000
Solihull	15,000
South-east Staffordshire	124,000
South Staffordshire	127,000
The Wrekin	48,000
Walsall North	22,000
Walsall South	130,000
Warley East	125,000
Warley West	45,000
West Bromwich East	40,000
West Bromwich West	480,000
Wolverhampton North East	101,000
Wolverhampton South East	629,000
Wolverhampton South West	111,000
Total	5,017,500

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17066]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Details of equipment stolen or otherwise unaccounted for from the Department during the last 12 months are as follows. All incidents involving losses exceeding £5,000 are listed individually, to the nearest £1,000.

1996–97		*Value (£)*
IT equipment incidents	34	375,000
Other equipment incidents	1	3,000
Items over £5,000, as follows:		
Irreparable damage to personal computers		60,000
Theft of:		
Memory SIMMs		20,000
File Server		100,000
Memory SIMMs		16,000
Memory SIMMs		7,000
Theft of personal computers		5,000
File server		100,000
Theft of PC		10,000

Medical Research

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidelines exist for the procedures to be adopted by the Medical Research Council when it seeks contributions to research work from individuals who might benefit from the outcome of that research. [17144]

Mr. Ian Taylor: External sponsors of research may frequently stand to benefit from the outcome of that research whether they be commercial organisations or Government Departments. The MRC finance guide, which is distributed to all unit directors, contains broad guidelines on seeking and managing external funding. The MRC's policy is to accept external funding only under explicit terms of contract which protect the council's independence. In particular, the council will not carry out research with external funding unless it fits clearly within its mission. Under its terms of contract, the council retains freedom to publish results, and there are restrictions on the use of results, and of the council's name, without prior consent.

Workplace Bullying

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what is his Department's estimate of the number of working days per year lost as a result of workplace bullying; [17459]

(2) what is his Department's estimate of the annual cost of working days lost as a result of bullying in the workplace. [17458]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* Workplace bullying is an imprecise concept and therefore difficult to define. Legal remedies exist to deal with some forms of unreasonable behaviour in the workplace. It is impossible to estimate the number and cost of working days lost as a result of workplace bullying.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action his Department is taking to tackle workplace bullying. [17467]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The Government would always encourage employers to ensure their employees are treated with due consideration. Legal remedies exist to deal with particular instances of unreasonable behaviour in the workplace.

Publicity

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what was his Department's expenditure on contractors to provide publicity and news services for each agency and non-departmental public body in each year since 1979–80; [15368]

(2) what was his Department's expenditure on staff employed full-time and part-time in each agency and non-departmental public body to provide *(a)* publicity and *(b)* work on press and media in each year since 1979–80. [15369]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* For the agencies, responsibility for expenditure on these areas and for staff resources devoted to them lies with the chief executives. I have asked them to reply direct. The information requested in respect of my Department's non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 25 February 1997:

You asked the President of the Board of Trade two questions about the Department of Trade and Industry's expenditure on contractors to provide publicity and news services; and on staff employed to provide publicity and work on press and media. I am replying in relation to The Insolvency Service.

Official Receivers have a statutory obligation to advertise each compulsory corporate and personal insolvency in the London Gazette and one other newspaper; but this is not a Departmental expense as it is funded by the estate of the insolvent company/individual.

Generally publicity material for The Insolvency Service is provided via the Department's central press office. This includes all press releases and notice of publication of for example the Insolvency General Annual Report and The Service's Agency Annual Report and Accounts. The Central Office of Information deals with publicity for Company Directors Disqualification matters.

Costs charged to The Insolvency Service for the last two years have been:

1994/95: Nil

1995/96: £34,996.

Figures for earlier years could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The 1996/97 figures will not be available until the end of the current financial year.

There are no staff employed full-time or part-time specifically to provide publicity and or to work on press and media issues. Any such work falls within general staff duties.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 25 February 1997:

You recently asked the President of the Board of Trade about expenditure on publicity and news services. I am replying in respect of Companies House Executive Agency.

External expenditure on publicity, including paid advertising, for each of the financial years since 1991–92 is set out below:

1991–92: £332,000

1992–93: £445,000

1993–94: £307,000

1994–95: £367,000

1995–96: £353,000.

These figures include the costs of various campaigns to encourage companies and their directors to meet their obligations to file promptly at Companies House.

The staff effort devoted to publicity and press media activities has been approximately 3 full-time equivalents throughout the period. However this includes effort devoted to activities such as preparation of the Companies House Annual Report and Accounts, which currently derives from a statutory requirement, and other related matters. This is equivalent to a financial cost of some £75,000 a year.

I regret that information about earlier years is only available at disproportionate cost.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 25 February 1997:

I am replying for the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Questions to the President of the Board of Trade on the use of contractors for publicity and news services and on the cost of civil service staff employed on such activities.

Publicity press and media relations are part of the Patent Office's work on marketing and information. This work ranges from a Central Enquiry Unit which responds to questions from intellectual property specialists and the general public to a programme of Roadshows around Britain aimed at stimulating interest in patents and trade marks. In line with Government policy much of the specialised work connected with marketing and publicity is contracted out to the private sector. In 1995 the Patent Office's marketing and information work was reorganised and the expenditure on this activity in 1995/96 and subsequent years was as follows:

	Contracted out £	*Total budget including civil service staff costs* £
1995–96	338,000	1,012,000
1996–97	309,000	948,000
1997–98[1]	294,000	935,000

[1] Planned.

I regret that figures for 1979/80 onwards could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However the figures would not be directly comparable because of various reorganisations that have taken place in that time.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 25 February 1997:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your questions about expenditure on contractors and employed staff providing publicity and news services.

This Agency does not employ contractors to provide these services, neither are there any full-time or part-time staff employed solely for such work. Three full-time staff have publicity activities included in their job descriptions among other responsibilities. It is therefore not possible to separate the cost associated with publicity and media work.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 25 February 1997:

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Corporate and Consumer Affairs, John Taylor, MP, has asked me to reply, on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency, to your two questions concerning expenditure by contractors, and staff employment, in respect of publicity and news services since 1979–80.

I am unable to supply any information before the inception of the Agency on 1st April 1990, prior to which the work of this Agency was undertaken by a Division of the Department of Trade and Industry.

PQ 96/1170 - To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what was his Department's expenditure on contracts to provide publicity and news services for each Agency and non-departmental public body in each year since 1979–80.

I am unable to provide a detailed breakdown with respect to the individual amounts spent by contractors on behalf of publicity and news services for the Agency since 1990, but I have listed below the total Agency expenditures for these combined items in each financial year. It is the Agency's policy to retain contractors to provide the bulk of the Agency's requirements for publicity and I can confirm that the majority of the expenditure shown was incurred by contractors on behalf of the Agency.

Publicity and news service expenditure

Financial year	£
1990–91	140,511
1991–92	188,695
1992–93	228,123
1993–94	188,706
1994–95	211,634
1995–96	369,732

PQ96/1176 - To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what was his Department's expenditure on staff employed full-time and part-time in each Agency and non-departmental public body to provide a) publicity and b) work on press and media in each year since 1979–80.

From 1 April 1990 until December 1993, the Agency employed one member of staff on publicity matters, which was increased to two members of staff from January 1994. I am unable to provide a breakdown of staff salaries for the period, but the current costs are in the region £44,000.

Mr. Y. Habanako

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to seek the extradition of Mr. Y. Habanako; and if he will make a statement. [16915]

The Attorney-General *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* I have been asked to reply.

I take the hon. Member's question to refer to Mr. Y. Hamanaka who is at present in custody in Japan having pleaded guilty to fraud and forgery. The Serious Fraud Office is also investigating suspected offences in relation to Sumitomo Corporation. The question of charges and possible extradition does not arise until that investigation has been completed.

HEALTH

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency set up by his Department since the start of April 1992. [16972]

Mr. Horam: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Lariam

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department has considered the advice against the use of Lariam by aircrews contained in the Civil Aviation Authority's United Kingdom information circular of January 1995 in relation to the use of the drug by other visitors to overseas countries; and if he will make a statement. [17181]

Mr. Malone: Lariam is not recommended for people such as pilots and aircrews because of the possible side effects of dizziness and loss of fine precision movement, as advised by the manufacturer. This information was considered and included in the United Kingdom Health Departments' 1995 publication "Health Information for Overseas Travel", copies of which are available in the Library.

Residential Homes (Coventry)

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, column *161*, if he will investigate Coventry's half-way house pilot scheme to determine whether the allocation of patients to residential and nursing care home placements under the scheme is impartial, as between the profit and non-profit sector. [17054]

Mr. Burns: The placement of patients leaving the Coventry half-way house pilot scheme will be arranged in accordance with current national guidelines for the discharge of patients from national health service care and placements in residential accommodation. The scheme is due to end in May, when a full evaluation, including the views of patients, their families, carers and local general practitioners, will be carried out by Coventry health authority, the community health council and the Coventry department of social services.

Dissolved NHS Trusts (Financial Arrangements)

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial arrangements are being made in respect of NHS trusts dissolved on 1 April 1996. [17889]

Mr. Dorrell: The national health service trusts dissolved on 1 April 1996 were reconfigured with parts, or all, of other trusts or directly managed units. I propose to create new originating debt for six new trusts equal to the net assets transferred to them and to remit the outstanding originating debt of the dissolved trusts.

These operations involve no overall loss to the Exchequer. Her Majesty's Treasury has today presented a minute to the House giving the particulars and circumstances of the proposed remission which it has approved in principle.

Meningitis

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what funding was provided *(a)* for the current year and *(b)* for each of the previous five years for increasing awareness of the early symptoms of meningitis; [16655]

(2) what funds are available to local community-based groups that provide advice and counselling to victims of meningitis and their families and to groups which help to increase awareness of the symptoms of meningitis; and if he will make a statement; [16652]

(3) if he will institute a programme of awareness amongst child minders, pre-school playgroups, nurseries, schools and places of further and higher education regarding identifying the early symptoms of meningitis and providing appropriate immediate treatment. [16653]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health takes meningitis very seriously and recognises that appropriate awareness of the disease and parental alertness remain the best general protection. Meningococcal infections peak with most cases in children under one year; there is a second, smaller, peak in later teenagers. Information is, therefore, targeted in these areas. Health visitors provide new parents with the Health Education Authority's leaflet "A Guide to Childhood Immunisations", which includes advice on recognising the signs and symptoms of meningitis. Advice on recognising meningitis can also be found in the HEA's "Birth to Five" book which is issued to all first-time parents.

The Department of Health and the National Meningitis Trust collaborated in providing an information leaflet for parents of small children and teenagers. Public information leaflets on meningitis and septicaemia were sent to all general practitioners to be made available to the public. The HEA has also produced a leaflet and accompanying poster, "Look out for your mate", targeted at students which has been very widely distributed to colleges and universities. The chief medical officer held a press briefing for journalists last year to raise further public, professional and media awareness of meningitis. The chief medical officer also wrote to all doctors in January giving up-to-date advice on the early diagnosis of suspected cases of meningococcal infection and on the need for antibiotic treatment and urgent referral to hospital.

The Department of Health provides funding in a number of ways, for example to the National Meningitis Trust and the Meningitis Research Foundation to support their valuable information, advisory and support work. These organisations are also active in raising public awareness immediately prior to and during the winter peak and in providing support to those who have experienced meningitis. Through the Department's section 64 scheme, the National Meningitis Trust was awarded £15,000 in 1996–97 and the Meningitis Research Foundation was awarded £19,840 in 1996–97. Both are national organisations with local community branches.

The costs of preparing, printing and distributing leaflets and posters such as "A Guide to Childhood Immunisations", which is updated annually, are produced each year, and more than 1 million "Look out for your mate" leaflets and 9,300 posters have been distributed since October 1996.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people by age group suffered from meningitis during the past 10 years; how many of those cases resulted in fatalities or contributed to death; and of he will make a statement. [16654]

Mr. Horam: The number of isolates of Neisseria meningitidis and number of deaths by age group are given in the tables. The information is available only from 1988; for deaths, data are to 1995.

Public health laboratory service meningococcal reference unit isolates of neisseria meningitidis by age group

	Age group					
Year	*under 5*	*5 to 14*	*15 to 24*	*25+*	*Not known*	*Total*
1988	672	161	260	178	83	1,354
1989	665	165	272	197	54	1,353
1990	745	169	283	231	70	1,498
1991	716	155	232	187	108	1,398
1992	687	159	229	165	61	1,301
1993	670	161	189	210	68	1,298
1994	591	134	184	171	48	1,128
1995	707	195	300	237	18	1,457
1996	647	183	336	270	56	1,492

Meningococcal infections; deaths by age groups

	age group				
Year	*under 5*	*5 to 14*	*15 to 24*	*25+*	*Total*
1988	88	21	28	37	174
1989	97	20	41	45	203
1990	93	15	24	37	169
1991	92	18	34	26	170
1992	72	15	31	44	162
1993	81	20	23	49	173
1994	77	8	24	41	150
1995	88	19	46	43	196

Source:
Office for National Statistics Mortality Statistics: Cause, Series DH2.

Human Growth Hormone Treatment

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring for Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease he has undertaken among patients who have received human growth hormone treatment; and if he will make a statement. [17259]

Mr. Horam: The monitoring of patients treated with human growth hormone has, since 1992, been undertaken by the human pituitary growth hormone follow-up unit at the Institute of Child Health, London.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in England and Wales *(a)* before 1 July 1977 and *(b)* after 1 July 1997 have (i) received human growth hormone treatment, (ii) died as a result of human growth hormone treatment, and (iii) been diagnosed as ill as a result of human growth hormone treatment; and how many court actions have been raised, or are currently pending, as a result of death or illness following such treatment. [17260]

Mr. Horam: The available information covers the whole of the United Kingdom.

(i). The number who received human growth hormone treatment

	Number
Up to 31 December 1976	641
1 January 1977 to 31 December 1977	138
Since 1 January 1978	1,122

The data are available by calendar year only.

(ii) The number of human hormone patients who have died of Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease : 20

(iii) The number of human growth hormone patients with the symptoms of Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease : two

(iv) Number of court actions : one

(v) Number of court actions pending (including appeals) : two

Nurses

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses in England were aged *(a)* between 20 and 30, *(b)* between 31 and 40, *(c)* between 41 and 50, and *(d)* over 50 years in each year from 1987–88 to 1995–96. [12690]

Mr. Horam *[pursuant to his reply, 18 February 1997, c. 543–46]:* I regret that one of the figures provided in my previous reply was incorrect.

The figure for unqualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff with ages not known in 1989 should have read 1,140, not 8,950.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Punishment Attacks

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* sentenced for paramilitary punishment attacks in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement. [8335]

Sir John Wheeler: These crimes are brutal, unjust and have no place in a civilised society. It is not possible to provide figures in precisely the form requested as there is no specific offence of carrying out a "punishment attack". However, the RUC statistics indicate that between 1994 and 1996, 62 people were charged with what appears to be punishment beating-related offences, as follows:

	Republican	*Loyalist*
1994	2	6
1995	25	9
1996	8	12

To date, five convictions have been served as follows:

	Republican	*Loyalist*
1994	1	4
1995	0	0
1996	0	0

However, cases against a further 26 persons are pending.

	Republican	*Loyalist*
1994	1	0
1995	8	7
1996	0	10

Despite all the RUC's efforts, groups of terrorist thugs continue to attack those within their own communities whom they wish to intimidate, including those accused of alleged anti-social behaviour and assisting the security forces. In recent months, these attacks have increased in ferocity and many young men and women have been left with horrific injuries and will bear the scars for the rest of their lives.

Such attacks are against all concepts of justice and human rights. They are carried out by those who are most keen on their own rights, but are happy to deny similar rights and to play the part of judge, jury and executioner when it comes to dealing with others. The RUC is the only legitimate law enforcement agency in Northern Ireland, and the Government urge anyone who knows anything about these brutal attacks to tell the police. They also incur substantial costs to the community in NHS, compensation claims and other costs.

Housing Executive Waiting List

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in west Belfast are currently registered with A1 status on the Housing Executive waiting list. [16454]

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Executive, whose chief executive has advised me that there are 401 people in west Belfast with A1 status on the waiting list.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency set up by his Department since the start of April 1992. [16968]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is not available as the establishment of next steps agencies follows from an administrative process involving wide consideration of various aspects of proposals for agencification. There is therefore no unique cost attributable to agencification.

Nature Reserves, Historic Buildings and Country Parks

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has for the contracting out of the management and maintenance of *(a)* national nature reserves, *(b)* historic buildings and *(c)* country parks in Northern Ireland; and whom he has consulted on these proposals. [17388]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Environment and Heritage Service under its chief executive, Mr. Robert C. Martin. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Robert C. Martin to Mr. Eric Illsley, dated 24 February 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Environment and Heritage Service, I am responsible for operational aspects of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland's work heritage properties.

I am therefore responding to the Parliamentary Question which you put down in the House of Commons:

> "to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what proposals he has for the contracting out of the management and maintenance of:-
>
> (a) National Nature Reserves,
>
> (b) Historic Buildings, and
>
> (c) Country Parks in Northern Ireland,

and with whom he has consulted on these proposals."

The Environment and Heritage Service of the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland has begun a 3-year programme to assess the opportunities to disengage from direct management of its nature reserves, historic properties and country parks. Each property will be assessed individually and its management will be contracted out if a competent body is able to undertake the necessary work efficiently, effectively and economically. All 26 district councils and relevant voluntary conservation bodies have been approached.

DEFENCE

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria were used in the choice of the senior researcher appointed by his Department to investigate the psychological aspects of Gulf war syndrome; and if he will list the other short listed candidates indicating their qualifications. [16993]

Mr. Soames: Professor Simon Wessely and Professor Anthony David of Kings' college school of medicine and dentistry, London, are conducting a controlled epidemiological and clinical study into the effect of Gulf war service on service men and women of the UK armed forces. This study is being fully funded by the US Department of Defence; it was one of 12 studies announced by the US Government in June 1996 following an exhaustive, independent peer review. The main objective of the study is to determine whether service in the Gulf war, and factors specific to the Gulf deployment, are associated with an increase in physical or psychological morbidity. This study will be closely co-ordinated with those announced last December, being undertaken Dr. Doyle and Professor Cherry, which are being funded by my Department.

Defence Medical Services Organisation

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the restructuring of the Defence Medical Services Organisation. [17904]

Mr. Soames: The Defence Medical Services Organisation is established primarily to provide care for service personnel deployed on operations. This is a vital task. To provide this capability, the DMSO must comprise peacetime structures and a recognised training base which can produce uniformed medical personnel with the right skills and in sufficient numbers to meet forecast operational demands. That peacetime structure can also make a significant contribution to the provision of secondary medical care for all service personnel and, in certain circumstances, for their dependants, to facilitate effective training, it works closely with the NHS.

Since 1984, there has been a series of separate studies into the Defence Medical Services Organisation, aimed at rationalising an area which was consuming over 2 per cent. of the defence budget and adapting them to the changing strategic environment. This work culminated in the defence costs study in 1994, which recommended major restructuring of the DMSO to enable it to provide sufficient rapidly deployable units, primarily manned by regular personnel, to support forces deployed on operations, and a more efficient and cost-effective support structure, including establishing a number of agencies to provide secondary medical care and recognised training for medical personnel.

These necessary changes have meant major upheavals for the DMSO which, naturally, not all those involved have welcomed. The DMSO was suffering from some shortages of personnel—particularly anaesthetists, orthopaedic surgeons and intensive care nurses, mirroring shortages in the NHS—and we are striving to improve this situation. We have established all the key elements of the new organisations and we are now focusing on achieving the right balance in their relationships with the NHS and their function as military units in the light of experience with the operation of the new structure.

Three regular field hospitals of 200 beds have now been established with permanent command and administrative staff. The clinical staff to support the field hospitals will be drawn from the Defence Secondary Care Agency. There are currently gaps in some specialities which we look to fill, as we did in the Gulf and in Bosnia in other specialisations, by volunteer reservists under the provisions of the Reserve Forces Act 1996. We have provided the proper level of medical support to British troops on operational deployment in the Gulf, Bosnia and elsewhere.

Defence planning to reflect the changing strategic circumstances has already evolved further since 1994. We have therefore set up a study team to examine whether these new circumstances, together with recent changes in medical practice, require further changes to our detailed assumptions for the provision of medical support to the front line. This should report by the middle of the year.

We continue to improve our holdings of medical equipment and supplies. Two sets of containerised modular operating theatres are now in use in Bosnia. We intend to purchase more of those in the future; the next will be delivered later this year. We also plan to improve medical facilities in RFA Argus for its role as a hospital ship.

At the time of the restructuring of the DMSO—which involved the closure of three service hospitals and the concentration of medical facilities at the Royal hospital, Haslar and in three Ministry of Defence hospital units at Derriford, Frimley Park and Peterborough—waiting lists increased. They have now been substantially reduced through robust management action by the new Defence Secondary Care Agency. There is also a programme of improvements at the Royal hospital, Haslar. Most of the enhancements to the clinical facilities should be completed by June 1997, with the remaining programme of capital works—for health and safety—completed over the next two years.

Work to align terms of service for medical personnel in each of the three services and so produce a more cohesive DMSO is well in hand. The first measures will be implemented in April. Naval and Army medical and dental officers will be allowed to extend their short-service commissions in line with current RAF policy to enable them to complete their clinical training in uniform, and there will be a common return of service for that training.

Young officers are being attracted into the DMSO on cadet schemes, and there are early and encouraging signs that an increasing number of them are prolonging their service to take advantage of the improved facilities and opportunities offered by the new structure. We are determined to build on this, and to provide the armed forces with the medical support appropriate to their needs.

Nuclear-powered Submarines

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of the decommissioning and lay-up of nuclear-powered submarines in each of the past 15 years. [16561]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Ships Support Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. V. Babington to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 25 February 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the costs of decommissioning and laying up of nuclear powered submarines in each of the last fifteen years, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Ships Support Agency.

The cost details on the attached table relate to the period 1990/91 to 1996/97 exclusively; prior to that date only HMS DREADNOUGHT underwent decommissioning and lay-up, in 1982/83, and it is not possible to provide costs for this vessel.

Costs of decommissioning and lay-up of nuclear submarines

£ million

Project	*Financial year* 1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	*Total*
Warspite	1.6	9.6	—	0.1	—	—	—	11.3
Conqueror	—	4.7	5.7	—	0.2	—	—	10.6
Courageous	—	—	9.9	0.9	—	—	—	10.8
Churchill	9.0	2.2	—	—	—	—	—	11.2
Swiftsure	—	1.6	9.9	—	—	—	—	11.5
Revenge	—	—	8.2	6.5	4.0	—	—	18.7
Resolution[1]	—	—	—	—	0.3	2.1	13.8	16.2
Total at outturn prices	10.6	18.1	33.7	7.5	4.5	2.1	13.8	90.3

1. Valiant, Renown and Repulse have not yet completed their de-fuelling, de-equipping and layup preparations (DDLP) so are not included in this table.
2. It is not possible to provide costs of HMS Dreadnought's DD and LP; the information insofar as it is available could be provided only at disproportionate cost.
3. Average annual maintenance costs of decommissioned nuclear submarines are £50,000 and ten yearly dockings are approximately £3 million.
4. Financial year 1993–94 costs for HMS Warspite spread into years financial year 1992–93.

[1] HMS Resolution's DD and LP completed January 1997. Final costs are not yet available.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service (Charges)

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Attorney-General how many charges were received by the Crown Prosecution Service from each of the police forces in England and Wales in each of the past five years; and how many of these were *(a)* discontinued and *(b)* withdrawn or otherwise not proceeded with during the same period in respect of each force. [17118]

The Attorney-General: Cases discontinued by the CPS fell from 193,110, or 13.3 per cent. of completed cases in magistrates courts, in 1992 to 153,274, or 12 per cent. of completed cases, in 1996.

Tables providing detailed information about the outcome of cases conducted by the Crown Prosecution Service in each of the past five years were placed in the Library of the House as part of my written answer yesterday to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), *Official Report*, 24 February 1997, column 22. The Crown

Prosecution Service records the outcome of proceedings by numbers of defendants rather than charges, and statistics are maintained for CPS areas which correspond to the police forces as shown on a new table which, to assist the hon. Member, I have added to the tables in the Library.

List of police forces served by each CPS area

CPS area	*Police force*
North	Cumbria
	Durham
	Northumbria
	Cleveland
Yorkshire	North Yorkshire
	West Yorkshire
Mersey/Lancashire	Lancashire
	Merseyside
Humber	Humberside
	Lincolnshire
	South Yorkshire
North West	Cheshire
	Greater Manchester
East Midlands	Derbyshire
	Nottinghamshire
	Leicestershire
	Northamptonshire
Wales	North Wales
	Dyfed-Powys
	South Wales
	Gwent
Midlands	Staffordshire
	West Midlands
	Warwickshire
Anglia	Bedfordshire
	Cambridgeshire
	Hertfordshire
	Essex
	Norfolk
	Suffolk
Severn/Thames	West Mercia
	Gloucestershire
	Wiltshire
	Thames Valley
South West	Avon and Somerset
	Devon and Cornwall
	Dorset
South East	Hampshire
	Surrey
	Sussex
	Kent
London	City of London
	Metropolitan

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Certified Herds Scheme

Mr. French: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to submit proposals for a United Kingdom certified herds scheme to the European Commission; and if he will make a statement. [17888]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have, today, submitted to the Commission papers that explain how the UK has fulfilled the pre-conditions laid down under the Florence agreement, our proposals for a UK export certified herds scheme and the scientific basis for that scheme. A copy of these papers has been placed in the Library. I have urged the Commission to ensure that the consultation procedure laid down in the Florence agreement is initiated immediately so that we can resume exports of meat from animals in export certified herds as quickly as possible. I have also written to my counterparts in other member states to explain how we have implemented the BSE eradication programme in the UK and to seek a constructive contribution to the discussion of our proposals.

Illegal Animal Imports

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animals were reported as illegally landed in the United Kingdom in 1996. [15638]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Notices were served on 554 consignments in 1996 for offences against animal health legislation governing the importation of live animals into the United Kingdom. Information on the numbers of animals involved could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

BSE

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current cost per animal of the incineration process for cattle diagnosed as suffering from BSE. [16243]

Mr. Baldry: The current costs of having cattle suspected of showing clinical signs of BSE incinerated in one of the nine plants currently contracted to the Department ranges from £105 to £135 per beast.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what regulations govern the disposal to landfill of cattle carcases with specified bovine material removed. [16232]

Mr. Baldry: The landfilling of controlled waste is subject to the waste management licensing provisions of part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994. Waste management licences contain appropriate terms and conditions. Among other matters, these will specify the types and quantities of waste which may be disposed of the in each site. The Environment Agency is responsible for the administration and enforcement of the licensing system. Landfill site operators are also subject to the duty of care provisions in section 34 of the 1990 Act and the Environmental Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991.

It is relevant that all cattle suspected of displaying clinical signs of BSE are slaughtered and their carcase sent for direct incineration and that cattle slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme are either incinerated or rendered and destroyed.

The Animal By-Products Order 1992 and the Specified Bovine Material (No. 3) Order 1996 are also relevant.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total amount of meat and bonemeal in storage from the over-30-months scheme; what is the cost of storage; and what plans he has for its disposal. [16195]

Mr. Baldry: The total amount of meat and bonemeal held in storage following the rendering of carcases under the over-30-months scheme was 168,100 tonnes as at 17 February 1997 and the cost to the Intervention Board executive agency is estimated to be about £60,000 per week.

The Government are actively pursuing a number of options for the disposal of meat and bonemeal arising from the OTMS. The Intervention Board recently agreed a contract with a high-temperature incineration company, ReChem, to burn MBM at its Fawley plant and has an exercise under way for further incineration facilities from which additional MBM disposal capacity is expected to emerge. Combustion trials have been carried out at PowerGen's test facilities at Ratcliffe on Soar, Nottinghamshire, and at National Power's test facilities at Didcot, Oxfordshire, to establish the feasibility of burning MBM in power stations. These trials have been monitored by the Environment Agency and the results will be placed on the public register. The test results are being fully evaluated, and full weight will be given to the protection of human health and of the environment before any decisions are reached.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many carcases are in storage under the over-30-months scheme awaiting rendering and final disposal; and what is the current weekly cost of storage. [16245]

Mr. Baldry: As at 16 February 1997, the carcases of some 208,000 animals slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme were being held in cold storage awaiting disposal at an average cost of some £270,000 a week.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle carcases were incinerated in 1996. [16246]

Mr. Baldry: A total of some 52,000 cattle were incinerated in 1996 by this Department or the Intervention Board executive agency, of which about 81 per cent. were animals purchased under the over-30-months scheme and about 19 per cent. BSE suspects.

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each county the number of carcases slaughtered as a result of the BSE crisis currently in cold storage and awaiting disposal; and if he will make a statement. [16528]

Mr. Baldry: As at 16 February 1997, the number of carcases of animals slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme and held in cold storage by county is as follows:

County	*Carcases*
England	
Avon	10,100
Cambridgeshire	3,300
Devon	2,700
Greater Manchester	3,800
Hereford and Worcester	1,300
Humberside	7,900
Kent	34,200
Lancashire	7,100
Lincolnshire	27,400
London	1,400
Shropshire	8,600
South Yorkshire	2,700
Staffordshire	800
Tyneside	1,600
Total England	112,900
Wales	
Ynys	3,500
South Glamorgan	2,600
Newport, South Wales	3,900
Total Wales	10,000
Scotland	
Border Region	2,300
Dumfries and Galloway	9,100
Grampian Region	2,600
Highland Region	17,800
Strathclyde	2,700
Total Scotland	34,500
Northern Ireland	
County Armagh	27,000
County Down	8,600
County Fermanagh	5,800
County Tyrone	9,200
Total Northern Ireland	50,600
Total United Kingdom	208,000

Disposal of this material will be completed at a pace determined by control requirements and the availability of rendering and incineration capacity.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which locations in the past 10 years *(a)* cattle infected with BSE, *(b)* rendered meat and bonemeal, *(c)* cattle carcases slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme, *(d)* specified bovine material and *(e)* ash from incinerated cattle, have been landfilled. [16847]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her on 11 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns *143–45*.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make an assessment of the relative safety of *(a)* landfilling and *(b)* incineration as methods of disposal of cattle waste, under the BSE eradication schemes; and if he will make a statement. [16849]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* Cattle suspected of displaying clinical signs of BSE are disposed of by direct incineration in plants contracted to MAFF, which are subject to authorisation by the Environment Agency or relevant local authority under part I of the Environment Protection Act 1990. Cattle slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme are incinerated, or rendered and destroyed in accordance with the requirements of Commission regulation 716/96/EEC. Specified bovine material is also removed from cattle slaughtered for human consumption and consigned for rendering or direct incineration.

The independent Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee has considered the current and proposed methods of dealing with waste material from the slaughter of cattle, including landfill and incineration, and concluded that these are safe. A news release reporting its conclusions was issued by MAFF on 7 June 1996 and a copy is available in the Library.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the quantity of rendered meat and bonemeal presently stored in Britain under the BSE eradication programme; [16896]

(2) if he will list the tonnage of *(a)* cattle carcases, *(b)* rendered meat and bonemeal and *(c)* tallow by location of storage. [16898]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* I have provided the information requested on the number of carcases in cold storage by location in the answer given to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) today.

Returns of meat and bonemeal and tallow delivered to store continue to be collated. However, as at 17 February 1997, these indicate that there were some 168,100 tonnes of rendered meat and bonemeal—130,600 tonnes Great Britain—and 101,800 tonnes of tallow in store in the UK from animals slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme, as is shown in the table:

County	*Meat and bonemeal (Tonnes)*	*Tallow (Tonnes)*
England		
Devon	41,500	—
Essex	—	30,400
Lancashire	58,000	—
Merseyside	5,500	71,400
Total England	105,000	101,800
Scotland		
Fife	4,000	—
Midlothian	21,600	—
Total Scotland	25,600	—
Northern Ireland		
County Antrim	29,600	—
County Tyrone	7,900	—
Total Northern Ireland	37,500	—
Total UK	168,100	101,800

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the level of infective units *(a)* per gram and *(b)* per tonne, found in rendered meat and bonemeal under the BSE eradication programme. [16897]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* No tests have been conducted to ascertain the level of infective units in the rendered meat and bonemeal produced under the over-30-months scheme. This is because the only way of achieving this would be to inject groups of mice with a number of samples of different dilutions of each sample to be tested. These tests would take two years and would be extremely expensive.

The independent Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee has concluded that there was no epidemiological evidence to suggest that the handling of MBM presented a risk to any of those engaged in the related trades. The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens has also considered the health risks associated with the handling of MBM and has issued generic guidance for all occupational groups, including those involved in storage. The Intervention Board executive agency has drawn the guidelines to the attention of storekeepers storing MBM.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16784]

Mr. Boswell: A list of the number of written and oral parliamentary questions answered by the Department in the Sessions 1982–83 to 1995–96, as supplied by the parliamentary on-line information service unit, has been placed in the Library. Figures for 1979–80 to 1981–82 are not available. The rest of the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost but is a matter of public record.

Quarantine

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the date by which owners of quarantine kennels must indicate whether they will agree to abide by the voluntary code of practice on welfare standards in quarantine premises. [16691]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* Owners of quarantine kennels who have not so far indicated this may indicate at any time that they will agree to comply with the voluntary code of practice for the welfare of dogs and cats in quarantine premises. We intend to publish a list of quarantine owners who have agreed to abide by the code of practice when inspection of their quarantine premises has been completed.

Food Safety

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the food safety aspects of manufacturing practices in the canning industry; and what guidelines his Department issues to the industry. [16985]

Mrs. Browning: In 1993 the Department funded detailed modelling of heat penetration into cans under different heating environments and heating times. As a result, a number of technical notes to be used for guidance by canneries were published. The Department also funded a review of canning operations which resulted in the book "Guidelines for the Safe Production of Heat Preserved Foods", which was published by the Department of Health in 1994. In 1994–95, the Department commissioned surveillance of the technical expertise and the application of good manufacturing practices in UK canneries. In response to this survey, which was published in 1996, the Department of Health has been in discussion with local authorities to ensure that they have appropriate technical support to enable them to assess the safety of canneries.

Warfarin-based Rodenticides

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action his Department has taken to alert users and manufacturers of warfarin-based rodenticides to the danger these products present to barn owls and other raptors. [17113]

Mrs. Browning: The Government work closely with manufacturers and trade associations to achieve an effective means of pest control while at the same time seeking to ensure the safety to wildlife. Promotion of the safe use of rodenticides, including those based on warfarin, is an on-going process and includes a campaign against illegal poisoning of wildlife, supported by industry and wildlife organisations and articles specifically on the safe use of rodenticides for trade journals and presentations to industry.

The statutory labelling requirements for all rodenticides make clear to users the means by which secondary risks posed by rodenticide products must be minimised. Guidance to users on the protection of wildlife is also contained in the code of practice for the safe use of pesticides on farms and holdings.

Renderers (Compensation)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements exist compensating renderers for the non-recovery of meat and bonemeal products. [17041]

Mr. Baldry: The Government are providing temporary financial assistance to the rendering industry as part of our package of measures designed to maintain essential links in the meat supply and disposal chain in the aftermath of the BSE crisis.

During 1996–97, rendering companies are receiving support estimated to total about £100 million. This is based on loss of income by comparison with 1995–96, with adjustments to take broad account of renderers' actual levels of throughput and costs this year.

We are currently consulting on proposals for delivering support, amounting to up to £59 million, during 1997–98. The disposal chain now has to come to terms with the changed value of animal by-products. At the same time we want to inject greater competition and market choice into the chain. We therefore intend that support should be phased out during 1997–98. Copies of our consultation papers are available in the Library.

Antibiotic-resistant Micro-organisms

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (1) what measures were taken and on what dates to publicise the request from the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food for information concerning the risks to human of antibiotic-resistant micro-organisms entering the food chain; and if he will make a statement: [16952]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* names and *(b)* employers of the members of (i) the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food and (ii) the working group set up by the committee to assess the risks to humans of antibiotic-resistant micro-organisms entering the food chain; and if he will make a statement; [16954]

(3) when the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food announced that it had set up a working group to assess the risks to humans of antibiotic-resistant micro-organisms entering the food chain; what were the date and method by which requests for information were first publicised; what was the last date on which responses could be sent to the secretariat; and if he will make a statement. [16953]

Mr. Horam: I have been asked to reply.

The Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food's working group on microbial antibiotic resistance in relation to food safety has sought objective scientific information by writing to industry, academia and a wide range of interested organisations including those in medicine. The fist mailing exercise was on 5 and 6 December 1996 and responses were requested by 17 January 1997. There have been two further mailings since, on 27 January and 14 February 1997, and over 2,000 letters have been sent. Specimen copies of the letters have been placed in the Library. Another similar exercise is planned for this week and the secretariat will be asked for responses by 10 April. The secretariat will accept responses from previous mailings up to this date.

The ACMSF announced that it was setting up the working group in its press release of 25 January 1996. Copies are in the Library. Information on the ACMSF and working group members and their employers is as follows:

Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food

	Membership
Chairman	
Professor D. L. Georgala	Independent scientific consultant. Retired Director of the Institute of Food Research
Members	
Mrs. F. Anderson	Nurse tutor and consumer representative
Mr. D. Boon	London Borough of Croydon
Mr. D. Clarke	Granada Purchasing Ltd.
Dr. R. J. Gilbert	Central Public Health Laboratory, Public Health Laboratory Service
Dr. A. M. Johnston	Royal Veterinary College University of London
Dr. M. J. Painter	North West Infection Control and Surveillance Unit, Public Health Laboratory Service
Professor S. R. Palmer	Public Health Laboratory Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (Welsh Unit)

Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food

	Membership
Dr. T. Roberts	Retired Head of Microbiology, Institute of Food Research
Ms B Saunders	Consumer Consultant
Dr. N. A. Simmons	Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital Trust; Honorary Senior Lecturer in Microbiology, the London Hospital Medical College
Dr. W. C. S. Smith	University of Aberdeen and Honorary Consultant in Public Health Medicine, Grampian Health Board
Mr. R. Southgate	Northern Foods plc
Dr. G. Spriegel	J. Sainsbury plc
Dr. M. Stringer	Campden and Chorleywood Food Research Association
Dr. T. Wilson	Northern Ireland Public Health Laboratory, Belfast City Hospital

Working Group on Microbiological Antibiotic Resistance in Relation to Food Safety

	Membership
Chairman	
Professor D. L. Georgala	Independent scientific consultant. Retired Director of the Institute of Food Research
Vice Chairman	
Dr. G. Spriegel	J Sainsbury plc
Members	
Mr. J. A. R. Dewhirst	Farmer; member of the East Yorks National Farmers' Union Pigs Committee and Farm Animal Welfare Council; Vice Chairman of the British Pig Association; UK Chairman of the European Pig Producers' Organisation
Professor A. T. Hart	Department of Medical Microbiology and Genito-Urinary Medicine, Royal Liverpool Univeristy Hospital
Dr. A. M. Johnston	Royal Veterinary College, University of London
Dr. L. Piddock	Department of Infection, University of Birmingham
Ms B Saunders	Consumer consultant
Dr. N. A. Simmons	Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital Trust; Honorary Senior Lecturer in Microbiology, the London Hospital College
Dr. D. J. Taylor	Department of Veterinary Pathology, University of Glasgow Veterinary School
Dr. P. Wall	Consultant Epidemiologist, Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits (Parents)

12. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what liaison he has with the Department of Education and Employment to co-ordinate benefit payments with the needs of parents with children at school. [15750]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: We regularly discuss issues of mutual interest with the Department for Education and Employment.

Child Support Agency

13. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he intends to take to prevent parents making fraudulent submissions to the CSA. [15751]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The Child Support Agency already requires a high level of verification of information provided by parents. Also the departures system, introduced in December last year, allows the agency to deal with cases where there is an allegation of misrepresentation of circumstances. Nevertheless, we are actively considering whether to make it an offence to give a false statement to the Child Support Agency.

18. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of staff who have resigned from the Child Support Agency as a result of stress. [15758]

Mr. Mitchell: Figures are available only for the past two years. During this period 15 members of staff, out of a total of some 6,000 in post, have resigned from the Child Support Agency citing stress of some type as a reason.

20. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average administrative cost of delivering a girocheque to the parent with care with particular reference to the average number of weeks between assessments. [15760]

Mr. Mitchell: In cases where the Child Support Agency collects maintenance, it is transferred to the parent with care by automated credit transfer wherever possible. When computer-produced girocheques are used, the average cost of production and posting is 50p. The frequency of maintenance assessments has no bearing on this cost.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a monthly breakdown of the amount of uncollected maintenance owing to the Child Support Agency collection service since 1994 showing the amount attributable to *(a)* type A interim assessments and *(b)* other assessments. [15608]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 24 February 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about uncollected maintenance.

I am unable to provide you with the exact information you have requested. An enhancement to our systems provided information on interim maintenance assessments outstanding and full maintenance assessment debt from January 1997. This showed £585,514,053 outstanding related to interim maintenance assessments; of this amount it is estimated that £193 million is as a result of interim maintenance assessments imposed prior to April 1995. £448,903,181 related to full maintenance assessment debt; approximately £271 million of this amount is currently the subject of agreement for repayment by instalments, which are closely monitored by the Agency. This leaves approximately £178 million of full maintenance assessment debt to be pursued.

A further system enhancement is currently being developed which will provide monthly information on category A interim maintenance assessments and other assessments for the financial year 1997/98.

I hope this is helpful.

Income Support

14. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are dependent on income support currently; and how many were dependent on the equivalent benefit in 1978. [15754]

Mr. Roger Evans: There were 9.8 million people living in families receiving income support in February 1996. In November 1978 there were 4.6 million people living in families receiving supplementary benefit.

Notes:

1. Numbers include claimants, their partners and dependants.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Sample size 1978 supplementary pension cases one in 200.
4. 1978 supplementary allowance cases one in 50.
5. 1996 income support cases 5 per cent.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry February 1996.

Supplementary Benefit Statistics Annual Enquiry 1978.

24. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated number of people receiving income support; and what was the number in equivalent benefit terms, in 1979. [15764]

Mr. Evans: There were 5.71 million income support recipients in February 1996. In November 1979 there were 2.855 million supplementary benefit recipients.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Sample size 1979 supplementary pension cases one in 200.
3. 1979 supplementary allowance cases one in 50.
4. 1996 income support cases 5 per cent.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry February 1996.

Supplementary Benefit Statistics Annual Enquiry 1979.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the value of the £8,000 upper capital limit for income support in 1997–98 if it had been uprated by (i) prices and (ii) earnings since its introduction. [14284]

Mr. Evans: The £8,000 capital limit for income support would be worth (i) £10,704.40 if uprated by prices, and (ii) £11,410.30 if uprated by average earnings.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the value of the £3,000 capital limit for income support in 1997–98 if it had been uprated by (i) prices and (ii) earnings since its introduction. [14283]

Mr. Evans: The £3,000 capital limit would be worth (i) £4,421.40 if uprated by prices, and (ii) £5,111.65 if uprated by average earnings.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in 1997–98 of uprating *(a)* the £3,000 capital limit and *(b)* the £8,000 capital limit for income support for (i) pensioners and (ii) all recipients of income support to the level it would have been in 1997–98 if it had been uprated with prices since introduction. [14287]

Mr. Evans: The estimated costs in 1997–98 if the lower and upper capital limits in income support had been uprated each year since their introduction in line with prices are (i) £50 million if only pensioners are included and (ii) £60 million if it is applied to all income support and jobseeker's allowance recipients.

Notes:

1. This is estimated using the 1994–95 family resources survey, uprated to 1997–98 case loads and benefit levels.
2. Estimates exclude cases in residential care and nursing homes.
3. Estimates include consequential costs in housing benefit and council tax benefit from new income support claimants being passported or to these benefits.
4. Estimates for all claimants include the costs of introducing the same capital limits in jobseeker's allowance.
5. Adjustments to these estimates are made using the May 1995 income support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry and the May 1995 housing benefit/council tax benefit management information system.
6. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £10 million.

Lone Parents (Employment Schemes)

15. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will develop pilot schemes to involve the private sector in helping lone parents into work. [15755]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Up to 100,000 lone parents on income support will be offered help to get back into work under the parent plus scheme, which will be piloted in 12 areas over three years starting in April. Parent plus will involve both public and private sector teams in competing to find the best ways of helping lone parents to reduce their dependency on benefits.

In Preston, Wiltshire, Northamptonshire and Manchester the private sector have been invited to tender to provide innovative services to help get lone parents into work. Contracts will be issued to successful tenderers by the beginning of April and will stipulate that payment will be dependent on how many lone parents are helped into jobs. This will be the first time that private enterprise has been harnessed in this way to help people into work.

Child Benefit

16. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the procedures for the payment of child benefit in respect of children over 16 years of age in full-time education. [15756]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: If a child chooses to stay on in full-time education after 16, parents can continue to receive child benefit worth £560 per year towards the cost of maintaining him until education finishes or his 19th birthday, whichever is sooner.

Withdrawal of child benefit for this age group would involve the complex procedures of means testing, with the parents of many 16 to 18-year-olds unable to gain any help.

Housing Benefit

17. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will act on the advice of the Social Security Advisory Committee on his proposals on housing benefit for single people under 60 years. [15757]

Mr. Roger Evans: We expect to receive the Social Security Advisory Committee's report on our proposals regarding housing benefit for single people aged under 60 years later this month. We shall consider the committee's findings and recommendations carefully before taking final decisions.

Pensioner Incomes

19. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce a guaranteed minimum income for pensioners above current income support levels; and if he will makes a statement. [15759]

Mr. Heald: We have no plans to introduce a guaranteed minimum income for pensioners which, if set at 5 per cent. above current income support levels, would cost an estimated £2 billion per year.

21. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research his Department has evaluated into the extent of poverty among the population over retirement age. [15761]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: We conduct and evaluate many different pieces of research into the incomes of pensioners and other groups. These show that pensioners' average incomes have risen by 60 per cent. in real terms since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the level of pensioners' incomes. [15753]

Mr. Heald: Since 1979, pensioners' average incomes have increased by 60 per cent. in real terms.

Personal Pension Charges

22. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps the Government have taken to assess the impact of personal pension charges on individuals' future pension entitlements. [15762]

Mr. Heald: The level of charges was considered by the Government Actuary in his report on contracting-out terms, Cm 3221.

Incapacity Benefit

23. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current average waiting time for a tribunal hearing for those who have appealed after loss of benefit following an all-work test. [15763]

Mr. Burt: It currently takes an average of 21 weeks from the time an incapacity benefit appeal is lodged to the date of the tribunal hearing. During this time the appellant can claim unemployment benefits, or income support if they choose not to register for employment, without affecting their appeal.

Regulations on appeals processes were introduced last October to reduce waiting times.

National Insurance

25. **Sir Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what his estimate of the total national insurance yield would be if the employer's contribution were increased by 1 per cent. [15765]

Mr. Heald: If each rate of employer's national insurance contributions was increased by 1 per cent. from April 1997, the additional yield for 1997–98 would be approximately £3.25 billion.

State Retirement Pension

26. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the extra cost to public funds if pensions had been linked to earnings rather than prices since 1983. [15766]

Mr. Heald: The extra cost to public funds of uprating contributory basic retirement pension by the higher of earnings or prices since 1983 is estimated to be £7.9 billion in 1997–98.

Note:

All costs are rounded to the nearest 0.1 billion.

Source:

The gross costs of uprating were estimated by the Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the level of basic state pension which would allow payment from the age of 60 years at no additional cost to taxpayers. [15826]

Mr. Heald: The payment of basic state retirement pension from age 60 at no additional cost to the national insurance fund would mean reducing the basic state pension for a single person by £20 a week to around £40 a week. People retiring at 60 would remain on this decremented rate for the remainder of their lives.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if it is his policy to retain the basic state pension as a universal contributory benefit; and if he will make a statement. [15827]

Mr. Heald: We consider the basic state retirement pension to be the cornerstone of income in retirement. We remain committed to protecting the value of state pensions and they will be increased in line with prices from April at a gross cost of £730 million.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of introducing a state pension age of 60 years. [16137]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave him on 10 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *176*.

Pensions and Benefits (Earnings Link)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what have been the savings to his Department in each year since 1980 in constant prices of ending the link between state retirement pensions and average earnings. [16781]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Year	Extra gross cost (£ billion)
1980–81	0.2
1981–82	0.6
1982–83	1.0
1983–84	0.9
1984–85	1.8
1985–86	2.0
1986–87	3.1
1987–88	4.5
1988–89	5.5
1989–90	6.2
1990–91	6.9
1991–92	7.3
1992–93	8.5
1993–94	9.2
1994–95	9.2
1995–96	9.9
1996–97	10.1
1997–98	10.9

Notes:

1. The table shows the extra costs to the national insurance fund that would have arisen from uprating contributory basic retirement pension by the higher of earnings or prices in each year since 1980–81.

2. Gross costs are in 1997–98 prices, rounded to the nearest £0.1 billion. The estimates cover contributory basic retirement pension only and do not include any linked benefits or other benefits paid to people over pension age.

3. Costs net of any income-related benefits are not available.

Source:

Cash estimates were provided by the Government Actuary's Department and uprated to 1997–98 prices.

Benefits Agency Medical Service

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he plans to take to ensure that the chairman and board members of each of the companies contracting for the Benefits Agency medical service are fit and proper people to undertake such a public function; if he will promulgate a code of conduct for staff; and if he will publish the advice he gives on the values and standards of probity and accountability he expects them to observe. [17164]

Mr. Burt: The companies chosen to negotiate with the Department for the provision of the medical service were shortlisted according to EC procurement regulations. The criteria applied included integrity, capacity to provide the services, financial and economic standing.

All shortlisted companies confirmed that none of the circumstances described in article 29 of directive 92/50/EEC—UK Public Service Contracts Regulations 1993, regulation 14—applied.

The successful contractor will be required to ensure that the staff undertaking delivery of the medical service must conform to present published principles of public service.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to publish a performance review of the companies' efficiency strategies and financial plans of the companies running the Benefits Agency medical service. [17162]

Mr. Burt: There are no such plans.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) who will be the accounting officer for private sector companies contracting for the Benefits Agency medical service; [17176]

(2) what plans he has to ensure that the private companies which will run the Benefits Agency medical service are accountable to Parliament for the functions that they perform. [17156]

Mr. Burt: The contracting out of the Benefits Agency Medical Service will not change the nature of accountability in respect of its functions and finances. Ministers will remain accountable to Parliament and the chief executive of the Benefits Agency will continue to act as accounting officer.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what methods he intends to use to follow up audit recommendations and requirements in respect of the private sector companies taking over the functions of the Benefits Agency medical service; and if the Comptroller and Auditor General will have a right of access to contractors; [17178]

(2) if he will make a statement on the role of the National Audit Office in relation to private companies contracting for the provision of medical services to the Benefits Agency. [17436]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 23 January, *Official Report*, columns *721–22*.

Any audit recommendations will be followed up in line with departmental practice. In line with all Government contracts, full audit access provisions will be contained within the contract or contracts. The Comptroller and Auditor General will also have full right of access.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what computer systems he will require to be used by companies contracting to provide medical services to the Benefits Agency in order to secure the confidentiality of the health records of benefit claimants; [17165]

(2) if the companies contracting for the Benefits Agency medical service which have other databases deriving from other contracts to provide public services will be able to match the information between databases used in the performance of these functions; and what principles concerning the transfer of information will apply. [17172]

Mr. Burt: There will be no requirement to use specific computer systems. However, the successful contractor(s) will have a mandatory requirement to take measures to ensure the confidentiality, correct use and security of all data held or transmitted electronically. They must ensure that any data passed to them by the Department or by a third party, in relation to, or revealed during the course of the contract, are used only for the purpose of delivering the medical service by the appropriate personnel, and that the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984 are complied with.

All data obtained during the course of the contract will remain in the ownership of the Department.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what system of penalties for under-performance will be in place for contractors providing medical services for the Benefits Agency;[17167]

(2) what default procedure will be incorporated into contracts for the provision of medical services for the Benefits Agency for the notification of unsatisfactory performance. [17168]

Mr. Burt: In line with standard practice for Government contracts, a breach of contract including unsatisfactory performance or under-performance would result in a lower level of payment to the contractor(s). Continual unsatisfactory performance will entitle the Department to damages and may result in termination of the contract.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if copies of contracts agreed with public sector companies for the provision of medical services to the Benefits Agency will be placed in the Library. [17169]

Mr. Burt: Copies of the contract(s) will not be placed in the Library as to do so would prejudice the effective conduct of contractual activities between the Department and the successful contractor(s). However, when the contract(s) are awarded, information regarding the services and targets for output performance that form part of the contract, the criteria for the award and the overall contract value will be published in the line with existing Government and EC procurement guidelines.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social security who will evaluate the bids by contractors for the Benefits Agency medical service; and by what criteria. [17158]

Mr. Burt: The project team taking forward the contractorisation process responsible for carrying out the evaluation.

Evaluation of the bids will be based on financial risk and qualitative criteria which will be signed off by the appropriate authority within the Benefits Agency in line with best practice. Recommendations will then be put forward to the project steering group prior to submission to the Benefits Agency management team. The final decision will rest with Ministers.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library the financial memorandums setting out the terms and conditions attached to the funding of the Benefits Agency medial service following its contractorisation. [17160]

Mr. Burt: There will be no financial memoranda. Funding for the medical service provided by the successful contractor(s) will be provided by the Department.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if directors and other staff of the companies contracting for the Benefits Agency medical service will be required to declare any relevant interests; and where such information will be published. [17163]

Mr. Burt: A formal declaration of interest will not be requested. However, staff will be required to sign a confidentiality undertaking and comply with any requirements regarding security of information and conflicts of interest.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what standards of service he will require companies contracting to provide medical services for the Benefits Agency to achieve; and if he will list each area where a higher standard than that currently in force will apply. [17179]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 19 February, *Official Report,* columns *590–91.*

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has for a code of practice covering *(a)* public access to information on, and *(b)* regular publication of key information from, private companies contracting for the Benefits Agency medical services. [17171]

(2) what statistics concerning the activity and performance of the companies contracting for the Benefits Agency medical service he intends to publish. [17161]

Mr. Burt: The successful contractors will have a mandatory contractual requirement to comply with legislation and policies which apply to this Department, including the open government code of practice on access to government information.

The arrangements for the provision and publication of statistical information are currently being developed as part of the system for contract monitoring.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what requirements of confidentiality he intends to include in *(a)* the contracts of employment and *(b)* the contracts for sessional staff working for the private contractors which will be operating the Benefits Agency medical service. [17173]

Mr. Burt: There will be no change to the current rules governing confidentiality of information.

Anyone working for, or on behalf of, the successful contractors will be subject to the provisions of section 123 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 which makes it a criminal offence to disclose information acquired in the course of employment without lawful authority.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what mechanism he intends to establish for complaints against private companies running the Benefits Agency medical service. [17174]

Mr. Burt: The successful contractors will be subject to a mandatory contractual requirement to ensure that there is an effective procedure in place for all complaints received. The contract will not specify a mechanism for handling complaints. However, an effective procedure for handling all complaints will be a mandatory requirement.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will lay before Parliament the accounts of the private companies contracting for the Benefits Agency medical service in respect of this work. [17175]

Mr. Burt: No. The accounts of the shortlisted private sector companies, with the exception of Andersen Consulting, are available at Companies House. As a partnership, Andersen Consulting are not obliged to file accounts with Companies House. However, their

corporate report which was considered as part of the evaluation process to choose the shortlisted companies is available on request.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what audit requirements he intends to impose on the contractors taking over the Benefits Agency medical service; in what respects these will differ from the statutory requirements of audit in the private sector; and if he will list the specifications on which audit of the contractors will be based. [17177]

Mr. Burt: In line with standard practice for Government contracts, the contract(s) will include audit requirements which will be contained within the contract and will give the Department, and its statutory auditors, audit access provisions over and above the statutory requirements. The audit of the contractors will be based on the audit specifications contained in the contract.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what performance measurement systems will be included in contracts to provide medical services for the Benefits Agency. [17166]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 10 February, *Official Report*, column *75*.

The performance of the successful contractors will be monitored rigorously. The system by which performance will be monitored is under discussion with the shortlisted contractors and the users of the present medical service.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for the auditing of the Benefits Agency's performance of its responsibility to ensure that its obligations are met by the companies with which it contacts for medical services. [17170]

Mr. Burt: Contract management procedures will be set in place to ensure that companies meet their obligations under the contract. There will be regular reviews with the suppliers of the medical service.

Contract management will be subject to normal audit requirements.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what specifications and operating instructions he will give to the private contractors which will run the Benefits Agency medical service; and what are the minimum standards which he will require. [17157]

Mr. Burt: The successful service providers will have to meet a minimum set of mandatory requirements which will be as stringent as existing standards for the provision of the medical service.

Disability Payments

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of raising the level of invalid care allowance to the level of *(a)* the jobseeker's allowance and *(b)* long-term incapacity benefit for each of the years 1997–98 and 1998–99. [17095]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

£ Million

	1997–98	*1998–99*
Jobseeker's allowance (25 and over rate)	£130	£140
Long-term incapacity benefit	£270	£300

Notes:
1. Estimates are in cash prices rounded to the nearest £10 million.
2. Estimates take account of offsetting savings in income-related benefits.
3. The estimates compare invalid care allowance with the 25 and over rate of jobseeker's allowance.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* lone parents, *(b)* couples with children and *(c)* single people who receive (i) family credit and (ii) disability working allowance and are employed are (1) earning below the lower earnings limit, (2) earning below the tax threshold and (3) paying income tax. [17097]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is in tables:

Level of earnings of family credit recipients shown by family type as at 31 August 1996

Family type	*Level of earnings*		
	Below lower earnings limit	*Below tax threshold*	*Paying income tax*
Lone parents	78,000	149,000	164,000
Couples	80,000	135,000	258,000

1. Couples and single people without children are not eligible to receive Family Credit.
2. Sample size is 5 per cent.
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest 1,000.

Level of earnings of disability working allowance recipients shown by family type as at 31 July 1996

Family type	*Level of earnings*		
	Below lower earnings limit	*Below tax threshold*	*Paying income tax*
Lone parents	413	692	604
Couples with children	1,042	1,512	1,400
Single people without children	1,646	2,394	2,823
Couples without children	504	674	461

1. Sample size is 100 per cent.
2. Figures are not rounded.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what internal guidelines are used by his Department on the manner of responding to parliamentary questions. [17159]

Mr. Burt: A copy of the internal guidance used by officials preparing replies to parliamentary questions has been placed in the Library. Departmental officials also use the guidance recently published in annexe C to the Public Service Committee's first special report, Session 1996–97, HC67.

State Earnings-related Pensions Scheme

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates he has made of *(a)* the impact on the revenue of the national insurance fund and *(b)* the savings in the current financial year from reduced expenditure on national insurance rebates and incentives

paid on contributions made to APPs if (i) all and (ii) half of those have opted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme into appropriate personal pensions and earn under £10,000 per annum were to rejoin SERPS. [15593]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* The net present value of the additional expenditure on SERPS in future years would be approximately £120 million at current prices if all those with earnings less than £10,000 were to rejoin SERPS for 1996–97 and £60 million if half of those with earnings less than £10,000 rejoined.

The savings on national insurance rebates and incentives for 1996–97 is estimated to be around £240 million if all those with earnings less than £10,000 were to rejoin SERPS and £120 million if half of those with earnings less than £10,000 rejoined.

Notes

1. A discount rate of 3.75 per cent. has been used to calculate the net present value of future expenditure. This discount rate is consistent with the Government Actuary's review of contracting out.

Disability Benefit Unit

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what responsibility the director of the disability benefit unit has for replying to letters from hon Members; for what reasons the hon. Member for Walsall, North was told in a letter of 31 January (ref. J9627090C) that the official correspondence section would be replying to him; and if he will make a statement about the internal organisation of the disability benefit unit. [16977]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Winnick, dated 24 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what responsibility the Director of the Disability Benefit Unit has for replying to letters form honourable Members; for what reasons the honourable Member for Walsall North was told in a letter of 31st January (ref. J9627090C) that the official correspondence section would be replying to him; and if he will make a statement about the internal organisation of the Disability Benefit Unit (DBU).

Can I first of all explain that as you copied me your letter of 28 January to the Director of Disability Benefits, I arranged for the issues raised to be investigated and replied personally on 20 February. Therefore the acknowledgement letter of 31 January from the Disability Benefits Director should have advised you that I would be responding. I apologise for any confusion this may have caused.

As I explained in this letter, much of the correspondence received by the Disability Benefits Director relates to the operational handling of individual cases. The Director has arranged for all issues arising from correspondence to be investigated by front line managers within the 11 Disability Benefit Centres and also the DBU. I should stress, however, the Director remains fully responsible for all replies and will, of course, respond personally if a customer remains dissatisfied,

The Agency issues guidance to managers on how to deal with official correspondence, including that from Members of Parliament. We are currently reviewing this guidance and will consider the processes in place at the DBU as part of this review.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 26 February 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Rehabilitation)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much time per month since January 1992 was spent by prisoners undergoing rehabilitation aimed at addressing their offending in *(a)* each prison, *(b)* each prison type and *(c)* the whole prison estate; [15988]

(2) how many rehabilitation courses aimed at addressing the causes of prisoners' offending were available in each month since January 1992 in *(a)* each prison, *(b)* each prison type and *(c)* the whole prison estate. [15969]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 26 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the availability of offending behaviour courses in prisons.

The information you requested on offending behaviour programmes by month and prison is not available. The Service provides core offending behaviour programmes which are designed centrally and delivered across the estate. The national totals of these programmes delivered each year are recorded centrally. The available figures are listed in the attached tables.

As well as the core programmes there are other offending behaviour programmes run in prisons according to need and resources. Records of these are not kept centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The Prison Service has a key performance indicator for the number of prisoners completing offending behaviour programmes which have been accredited as being effective in reducing offending behaviour. The sex offender treatment programme and the cognitive behaviour programmes have been accredited and the numbers of prisoners completing these programmes are being recorded for counting towards the key performance indicator. There is a continuing process of accreditation of offending behaviour programmes and as new programmes achieve accreditation records will become available of the details of these courses and the numbers of prisoners completing them.

Additionally, a wide range of educational and vocational courses are run which are designed to increase the skills and job prospects of offenders, thus assisting with their rehabilitation.

Prison service core offending behaviour programmes—completions since 1992–93

Year	Number completed	Hours per programme	Total hours
Sex offender treatment (SOTP) core programme—programme revised and extended with effect from April 1995			
1992–93	284	80	22,720
1993–94	439	80	35,120
1994–95	554	80	44,320
1995–96	406	180	73,080
SOTP relapse prevention/booster programme—piloted in 1995–96			
1995–96	33	56	1,848
Enhanced thinking skills—piloted in 1993–94—revised in April 1996 to 40 hours			
1993–94	46	28	1,288
1994–95	241	28	6,748
1995–96	631	28	17,668
Reasoning and rehabilitation—piloted in 1993–94			
1993–94	63	70	4,410
1994–95	44	70	3,080
1995–96	115	70	8,050

Prison Ship

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the decision was made to purchase a prison ship; what account was taken of experience in using ships for detaining asylum seekers; when Parliament was notified of the decision to purchase; what are *(a)* the total purchase costs and *(b)* the estimated running costs; and if he will make a statement. [15782]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 26 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking when the decision was made to purchase a prison ship; what account was taken of past experience in using ships for detaining asylum seekers; when Parliament was notified of the decision to purchase; what are the total purchase costs and the estimated running costs.

In order to respond to the rapid rise in the prisoner population several options were considered including the purchase or charter of a prison ship. The decision to purchase the prison vessel "Resolution" (to be renamed the "Weare") was made on 15 January.

We are aware of the difficulties experienced in using the "Earl William" for immigration detainees at Harwich in 1987. However, the "Earl William" was a converted ferry: the "Resolution"/"Weare" is a purpose-built vessel. It has been decided not to use the "Weare" to hold immigration detainees.

Parliament has not been formally notified of the decision to purchase the prison vessel, however Ministers have been kept fully informed. The cost of purchasing the floating prison is about £3.7 million and the cost of transporting it to the UK is about £800,000. It will provide a total of 400 places. We expect the cost per prisoner place to be approximately £16,200 which compares with an average figure for the category C estate of £16,500 (for the period April—September 1996).

Leyhill Prison (Escape)

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will order an immediate inquiry, reporting in public, into the escape of James Mynott from Leyhill prison. [16740]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Michael Stern, dated 26 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the abscond of James Mynott from Leyhill prison.

In accordance with our normal practice the governor of Leyhill prison has been instructed to conduct an inquiry into the abscond of James Mynott on 14 February 1997. The reports of such inquiries are not normally made public.

Military Corrective Training Centre

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Health and Safety regulations will still apply to the military corrective training centre after its partial conversion to a high-intensity regime. [16868]

Miss Widdecombe: The Crown's responsibilities under health and safety law are unaffected by the establishment of Colchester young offender institution at the military corrective training centre. Those responsibilities are the same in both the military and Prison Service parts of the site.

Prisoners (Ethnic Background)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current prison population by ethnic background for remand and convicted prisoners. [16870]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 26 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what is the current prison population by ethnic background for remand and convicted prisoners.

The information requested is contained in the attached table.

Population of Prison Service Establishment by Ethnic Origin, 31 January 1997[1]

Ethnic origin	*Remand*	*[2]Sentenced*	*Total*
All ethnic groups	11,500	46,100	57,600
White	9,310	38,030	47,340
Black	1,530	5,540	7,070
South Asian	330	1,310	1,640
Chinese and other	330	1,220	1,550

[1] All figures are provisional.
[2] Figures include those committed in default of payment of a fine.

Prisons (Drugs Testing)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, columns *211–12*, when he intends to write to the hon. Member in respect of mandatory drug testing; and if he will make a statement. [16983]

Miss Widdecombe: I hope to write to the hon. Member shortly.

Roisin McAliskey

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Ms R. McAliskey will be able to have her child with her in HM prison, Holloway should it be born while she is still remanded in custody in the United Kingdom. [17410]

Miss Widdecombe: The matter is being carefully considered.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent report by Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary on No. 5 area (south-west) of the Metropolitan police. [17971]

Mr. Maclean: Yes. I have today placed in the Library a note of the recommendations from the report, together with the responses of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and the police authority responses, which take into account the advice my right hon. and learned Friend and I have received from the Metropolitan police committee.

Special Secure Units

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints have been made in each month since September 1994 by prisoners within special secure units concerning *(a)* alleged ill-treatment and *(b)* sleep deprivation. [16354]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 26 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about complaints by prisoners in special secure units.

Prisoners may make complaints through a variety of channels. The detailed information required to answer your question could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Strip Searches

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (1) further to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *736*, at what level of the Prison Service the decision was made to introduce a closed-loop video system for use in the prisoners' strip search room at Long Lartin prison; what external legal advice was sought prior to its introduction; and at what date Ministers were informed; [16629]

(2) who carried out the evaluation of the closed-loop video system for use in the prisoners' strip search room at Long Lartin prison; and if he will list the principal conclusions of that evaluation; [16630]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *736*, when prisoners who had their earnings stopped or deducted on adjudication for refusing to undergo video-recorded strip searches received *(a)* an explanation and *(b)* an apology following the quashing of the adjudication; [16631]

(4) when prisoners at HM prison, Long Lartin were informed of the discontinuation of the closed-loop video system introduced for use in the prisoners' strip search room; when the cameras were removed; and how many prisoners were subject to disciplinary measures for refusing to be strip searched on the grounds that the search would be video-recorded; [16632]

(5) on what precise date video tapes recording random strip searches of prisoners at HM prison, Long Lartin in 1996 were destroyed; on what dates their destruction was ordered; and what grade of officer was instructed to supervise this process; [16633]

(6) if he will conduct an inquiry to establish whether unauthorised copies of the video recording of intimate body searches at Long Lartin were made. [16659]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answers 20 February 1997]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 26 February 1997.

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the use of video recording during the strip searching of prisoners at Long Lartin prison, its withdrawal from use and disciplinary measures taken against prisoners who refused to under video-recorded strip searches.

The Woodcock and Learmont reports indicated that much greater use should be made of CCTV and video in prisons as aids to security and safety, including during searching procedures.

The use of video during the strip searching of prisoners at Long Lartin was one of a number of new uses of video and/or CCTV introduced as part of the upgrading of dispersal prisons recommended by Sir John Woodcock. The overall upgrading programme was approved by me. Legal advice was not sought before the introduction of any new uses of video or CCTV. Ministers were kept informed in general terms of progress on the implementation of the Woodcock recommendations. They were not advised on the detailed operational aspects of implementation including the specific uses of video and CCTV.

The use of video during the strip searching of prisoners at Long Lartin was evaluated after four months of operation. The evaluation, carried out by the Directorate of Dispersals and Security Group at Prison Service Headquarters, concluded that the use of video recording did not provide sufficient improvement in the degree of protection to prisoners or staff to justify its continuance at Long Lartin or its introduction elsewhere.

The first prisoner to challenge his adjudication and have the result quashed was given an explanation on his complaint and request form in October 1996. The procedure for informing prisoners was then reviewed and each subsequent prisoner received a letter during December 1996 explaining that the Director of Dispersals had reviewed their case and since the study was a pilot the disciplinary awards had been quashed.

Each prisoner was also contacted to inform them what this would mean in their individual case.

A general notice to prisoners concerning the discontinuation of video recording during strip searches was not published. Prisoners were informed of the discontinuation on an individual basis. The cameras have not yet been physically removed, they have been disconnected and the recording facility has been removed. The system is therefore inoperative.

Ten prisoners were subject to disciplinary measures for refusing to be strip searched on the grounds that the search would be video recorded.

The video tapes which recorded the strip searches have not been destroyed. The tapes have been properly stored in a sealed bag and placed in a safe. The tapes will be incinerated in due course under properly supervised conditions.

No unauthorised copies of video recordings were made at Long Lartin prison. The authorised video recordings which took place were of strip searches not of intimate body searches.

Immigration Detainees

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration detainees have been transferred from HM prison Haslar to HM prison Rochester in each of the last three months; and if he will make a statement on the factors underlying the transfers. [17401]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* During the period 1 November to 31 January, a total of 10 immigration detainees were transferred from Haslar to Rochester. There were two such transfers in November 1996, three in December 1996 and five in January 1997.

Detainees may be transferred for a variety of reasons, but a number of transfers in early February resulted from planned refurbishment work at Haslar, which has now been postponed.

Magistrates Courts (Psychiatric Reports)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases heard in magistrates courts in England and Wales during 1995 and 1996 were adjourned for psychiatric reports; and in how many instances applications for adjournments were turned down. [16871]

Mr. Streeter: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

ENVIRONMENT

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16309]

Sir Paul Beresford: Registers recording the presence and treatment of asbestos, and any other hazardous materials, are maintained in the Department of the Environment's buildings. Assessments are carried out in accordance with current regulations.

Our procurement policy requires that no products containing ozone-depleting substances are purchased, and this was one of the aims of the contracts let in relation to the Department's two new headquarters buildings. Both buildings have been designed to achieve the highest standards in environmental performance; Eland house was recently awarded a very good BREEAM—Building

Research Establishment environmental assessment method—rating, and Ashdown house is also expected to achieve a similar rating in due course.

British Agrochemicals Association Ltd.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what meetings he has had with British Agrochemicals Association Ltd. in the past 12 months; what was the subject of the meetings; and if he will make a statement; [16290]

(2) what representations he has received from British Agrochemicals Association Ltd. in the past 12 months; what was the subject of those representations; and if he will make a statement. [16285]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has not met nor received representations from the British Agrochemicals Association in the last 12 months.

At the initiative of the BAA, officials in my Department and the Health and Safety Executive have met and corresponded with the BAA on a number of occasions in the last 12 months. Topics covered include organophosphate insecticides, the annual pesticide incidents report and the review of the European Community fifth environmental action programme. HSE officials also meet representatives of BAA at regular tripartite meetings under the aegis of the Health and Safety Commission and at other meetings on the operation and funding of the pesticide approval arrangements.

Energy-Efficient Housing

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what action he proposes in respect of dwellings identified by the English house condition survey as not physically capable of being made energy efficient at reasonable cost; and if he will make a statement; [16580]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure the replacement of the least energy-efficient housing stock; and if he will make a statement. [16613]

Mr. Clappison: It is the responsibility of housing authorities and other owners to determine whether replacement is the best course of action for the least energy-efficient housing stock, having regard to its efficiency and other physical and social factors. However, the survey indicates that for most dwellings, including many of those not capable of being brought up to current building regulation standards, improvement to a more moderate level of energy efficiency is likely to be the most cost-effective course.

Environmental Protection and Water

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what factors underlie the increased provision for environmental protection and water in the spring supplementary estimates; and if he will make a statement. [16881]

Mr. Clappison: A spring supplementary estimate has been proposed to take provision of £500,000 to cover pressure on rural water and sewerage grants, £76,000, and assisted areas sewerage grants £424,000, which are demand led. In addition, it is proposed to vire £578,000 from environmental publicity and the small company environmental and energy management assistance scheme into rural water and sewerage grants.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much his Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency set up by his Department since the start of April 1992. [16967]

Sir Paul Beresford: The only executive agency for which the Department of the Environment is responsible which has been set up since the start of April 1992 is the Planning Inspectorate executive agency. It was set up on 1 April 1992 to continue the duties already being carried out by the Planing Inspectorate. The only costs involved were administrative costs. These would have been minimal; no figures are available.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each financial year from 1994–95 to 1997–98 the change in the level of grants paid to Wolverhampton metropolitan borough council by the Government due to changes in the formulae used for standard spending assessments since the 1993–94 distribution *(a)* expressed in pounds, *(b)* divided by the band D tax base for council tax setting and *(c)* as a proportion of that tax base and scaled by ratio of each tax band to band D. [17212]

Sir Paul Beresford: The effect of changes of methodology in the formulae for the revenue support grant is approximated by the effect of such changes on the standard spending assessment. The SSAs are adjusted to be comparable with the SSA of the subsequent year. Changes in methodology also give rise to SSA reduction grant which reduces the effect of changes on council tax payers. The amounts for Wolverhampton are given.

	Effect on SSA		*SSA reduction grant*	
	£ million (a)	*£/Band D property (b)*	*£ million (c)*	*£/Band D property (d)*
1994–95	–14.5	–219	10.6	160
1995–96	–1.0	–15	6.4	96
1996–97	–0.8	–12	3.0	44
1997–98	–0.2	–2	0	0

The figures in columns (b) and (d) are then multiplied by the standard ratios 6/9:7/9:8/9:11/9:13/9:15/9:18/9 to derive equivalent figures for property bands A:B:C:E:F:G:H respectively.

Effect on SSA

Year	Band A £	Band B £	Band C £	Band E £	Band F £	Band G £	Band H £
1994–95	–146	–170	–195	–219	–317	–365	–438
1995–96	–10	–12	–13	–15	–21	–25	–30
1996–97	–8	–9	–11	–12	–17	–20	–24
1997–98	–2	–2	–2	–2	–4	–4	–5

SSA reduction grant

Year	Band A (£)	Band B (£)	Band C (£)	Band E (£)	Band F (£)	Band G (£)	Band H (£)
1994–95	107	124	142	160	231	267	320
1995–96	64	74	85	96	138	159	191
1996–97	30	35	39	44	64	74	89
1997–98	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Fire Safety

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects a suitable large-scale fire test for large insulated sandwich panels to be developed. [17281]

Mr. Clappison: I expect such a test, providing a harmonised European method, to be available in about two years. The International Standards Organisation is developing a still larger scale test, but I understand this may take three to five years to perfect.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to approve the removal of any fire safety legislation currently within local Acts of Parliament only where he is satisfied that there is equivalent national legislation affording the public the same degree of protection from fire. [17282]

Mr. Clappison: Fire safety provision in local Acts will be repealed where these overlap or conflict with the provision of the building regulations.

Local Authorities (Legal Costs)

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he has issued to local authorities on the use of their funds for the legal costs of councillors or officers criticised by the district auditor; and if he will make a statement. [17637]

Sir Paul Beresford: None. The use of funds to meet such costs is a matter for individual authorities.

Abondoned Mines (Water Pollution)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to consult on the contents of pre-abandonment notices which mine operators will be required to prepare when section 58 of the Environment Act 1995 is brought into force. [17910]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have issued a consultation paper today, inviting comments on our proposals for regulations.

These proposals are designed to enhance the Environment Agency's ability to tackle water pollution from abandoned mines. They set out the precise contents of the notification, which mine operators will have to send to the agency at least six months in advance of any intended abandonment.

The notification will include a range of information including the operator's opinion as to the consequences of the proposed abandonment. Variations to the timing and information requirements of the notice will apply where abandonment follows an emergency, and in certain cases of insolvency.

The prior notification to the agency of any intended abandonment will allow measures to be identified and implemented at the appropriate time to prevent or reduce water pollution after abandonment. Where a phased programme of abandonment is planned, this could be notified at one time, so as to reduce the burden of notification on the operator.

The scale of the problem of discharges from abandoned mines had to be set in context. Some 200 km of river length is affected by discharges from abandoned coal mines and some 400 km by discharges from abandoned metal mines. This, though, only represents 0.5 per cent. and 1 per cent. respectively of total river length monitored by the Environment Agency. Pollution caused by abandoned mines is a rather specialised and local problem but, where it occurs, its impact on the aquatic environment can be serious.

British Waterways Board

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to change the 1996–97 external financing limit for the British Waterways Board. [18136]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Grant in aid to the British Waterways Board is being increased by £1.233 million for 1996–97 to enable it to carry out additional major repairs to the canal network and other urgent maintenance. This increases the British Waterways Board's external financing limit to £51.033 million. It will be funded by savings on the vote and therefore does not represent an increase in public expenditure.

Noise Pollution

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the nature and terms of reference of the work commissioned by his Department

to study the impact of noise pollution in the countryside; who has the contract for this work; when it commenced; and when he expects a report to be *(a)* completed and *(b)* made public; [16850]

(2) at which locations and for which activities testing for noise has taken place in South Yorkshire as part of his Department's investigations into the impact of noise pollution in the countryside; [16851]

(3) what plans his Department has to consult local environmental groups in areas where his Department is testing for noise pollution. [16852]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answers 24 February 1997]:* In March 1996, the Building Research Establishment was contracted by my Department to recommend a suitable technique for the measurement and assessment of noise from clay target shooting, taking into account its impact on local communities. The recommended technique will be incorporated into a new code of practice on minimising noise from clay target shooting being prepared by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association and the British Shooting Sports Council.

The research involves the measurement of noise from 16 shooting sites in England, together with surveys of the reaction to the noise of residents living close to the sites. In South Yorkshire, measurements and surveys have been undertaken in Grenoside, Sheffield. The research does not involve consultation with local environmental groups.

The work is expected to be completed by the end of March 1997. My Department's policy is that, unless there are overriding reasons to the contrary, research findings are published as soon as possible after completion of the project.

Groundwater Levels

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on current levels of groundwater in the United Kingdom; and what assessment he has made of the possibility of water shortages in summer 1997. [17273]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The main aquifers are in England and north Wales. January 1997 levels in the sandstone were commonly the lowest on record. Levels in the chalk were also very depressed. Levels in the small aquifers of Scotland and Northern Ireland are within normal variation.

My Department receives weekly reports from the Environment Agency on the water resources position in England and Wales. In view of the predominantly dry weather during much of the winter, we have commissioned from the Environment Agency a report on the prospects for public water supplies this year, to be based on the water resources position at 28 February. We expect to receive this in mid-March.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new proposals he has for improving the home energy efficiency scheme. [17430]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* My hon. Friend the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency announced last December that this popular grant scheme, which has already improved more than 2 million homes occupied by the most vulnerable families, is to be upgraded. The changes, due to take effect in July this year, will make the scheme more flexible and capable of delivering even greater social and environmental benefits. The key feature of the new scheme will be the ability of eligible householders to select a package of work best suited to their own homes from a wider range of energy-efficiency measures.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Government Contracts

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list Government contracts and commitments which are *(a)* contractually and *(b)* non-contractually linked to the retail prices index. [17359]

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not held centrally, and may be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Prince's Trust

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to increase the participation of civil servants in Prince's Trust volunteers schemes. [18077]

Mr. Freeman: The Government are committed to increasing the civil service contribution to the Prince's Trust target of 25,000 volunteers annually by the year 2000. To this end, I have set a civil service-wide benchmark of 3 per cent. of civil servants aged 16 to 25 participating in PTV schemes by the same year. This compares to current participation running at a little under 1 per cent.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

New Parliamentary Building

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) of 3 February, *Official Report*, columns *458–59*, on the new parliamentary building, what estimate he has made of the additional costs arising from the delay. [17197]

Sir Raymond Powell: There are too many imponderables at this stage to be able to give a reliable forecast of the costs.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply

has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16797]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: A list of the number of written and oral parliamentary questions answered by this Department in the Sessions 1982–83 to 1995–96, as supplied by the parliamentary on-line information service unit, has been placed in the House Library. Figures for 1979–80 to 1981–82 are not available.

The rest of the information requested could be provided only at disproportional cost.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will pursue again with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees the question of a further tranche of funding for the programme for national persecutees by the German Government referred to in the answer of 30 June 1993, *Official Report*, column *497*. [17143]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The UNHCR wound up its indemnification hardship fund for national socialist persecutees in 1993. We do not intend to pursue the question of further funding with the UNHCR or the German Government.

UK Students (Foreign Residence Restrictions)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what restrictions apply to the length of time United Kingdom students may reside in *(a)* Australia, *(b)* Canada, *(c)* New Zealand and *(d)* South Africa; and what permits are required. [17354]

Mr. Hanley: Visa and immigration policy is a matter for the Governments of the countries concerned. I recommend that questions on entry clearance matters should be addressed to the appropriate high commission.

Albania

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many projects in Albania and at what cost have been supported by the Westminster Foundation on application from the Conservative party. [17285]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 19 February, *Official Report*, column *579–80*.

Internal Market Advisory Committee

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the specific complaints his Department has raised at the Internal Market Advisory Committee since May 1995. [17111]

Mr. Nelson: I have been asked to reply.

My Department's action single market—formerly the single market compliance unit—has arranged for 22 new cases to be raised at the Internal Market Advisory Committee since May 1995. These have covered:

Greek restrictions on cruises involving yachts registered and flagged outside Greece;

delays in the refunding of VAT by the Luxembourg authorities;

French refusal to accept international quality assurance certification;

restrictions on the organisation of sales and markets in Spain;

German ban on azo pigments;

Greek restrictions on the television advertising of toys;

German "Ü" marking requirements for steel construction products;

German re-testing requirements for engineering equipment;

French fire resistance certification requirements;

alleged ineffective enforcement in other member states of a directive concerned with dangerous imitations of foodstuffs;

French restrictions on the use of certain fuel tanks on commercial vehicles;

German "GS" marking requirements for medical products;

Irish mutual recognition failure in respect of plug standards;

discriminatory operation of the Finnish alcohol monopoly;

additional testing requirements for mobile cranes in several member states;

a discriminatory Finnish confectionery tax;

Dutch restrictions on the sale of blended edible oils;

non-recognition in France of British ski instructor qualifications;

Spanish marking of fuel for fiscal purposes;

a Dutch prohibition on the marketing of a particular type of saw;

Belgian restrictions on the use of air cleaning equipment;

Spanish type approval requirements for glass etching equipment.

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the outcome of the single market complaints raised by his Department's single market compliance unit raised by his Department's single market compliance unit with the Internal Market Advisory Committee. [17112]

Mr. Nelson: I have been asked to reply.

Of the 36 cases raised by action single market—formerly the single market compliance unit—at the Internal Market Advisory Committee, 12 have been resolved. The resolved cases are those concerned with:

Italian taxation of cars over 2 litres;

Dutch waste water regulations;

requirements for stack gas analysers to be tested to German standards;

Greek regulations on the content of soft drinks;

Dutch requirements involving the double-testing of electric fencing;

Portuguese requirements concerning lighting devices on tractors;

German requirements for re-testing of samples for liquid density standards;

delays in the refunding of VAT by the Luxembourg authorities;

French refusal to accept international quality assurance certification;

German "Ü" marking requirements for steel construction products;

French fire resistance certification requirements;

French restrictions on the use of certain fuel tanks on commercial vehicles.

Action single market is continuing to press for the successful resolution of the other cases which it has raised at the Internal Market Advisory Committee.

SCOTLAND

Easterhouse Police Office

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on Strathclyde police's statement regarding an alleged assault in a cell in Easterhouse police office on 14 February. [17114]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand that a man has been charged with attempted murder following the assault and that a report has been submitted to the procurator fiscal in Glasgow and that the matter is under further investigation. It would be inappropriate, therefore, to comment further at present.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency set up by his Department since the start of April 1992. [16970]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The work involved in establishing my Department's executive agencies has been undertaken mainly by officials as part of their normal duties. Estimates of the effort involved could at this stage be calculated only at disproportionate cost. In the case of the Fisheries Research Services, which is to become an agency on 1 April 1997, I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for industry and local government to the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) on 15 January 1997, *Official Report*, columns *277–78*.

Mortality Rates

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what have been the excess winter mortality rates in Scotland for each of the past 10 years in terms of *(a)* numbers and *(b)* percentages for (i) people over the age of 65 years, (ii) single parent families, (iii) people in receipt of income support, (iv) people with disabilities and (v) other; [17202)]

(2) what have been the excess mortality rates in Scotland for each of the past 10 years expressed *(a)* in excess numbers and *(b)* as percentages. [17442]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is no universally accepted definition of excess winter deaths and it would not be possible to calculate a rate for these. Details of family status, income support and disability are not collected at registration of death, the source of these statistics. The total number of deaths, and the number of deaths of those over the age of 65 years, by month for each of the past 10 years are given in the tables. The figures for 1996 are still provisional.

Deaths in Scotland by month 1987 to 1996

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*'1994*	*1995*	*1996*
All ages										
January	5,741	5,609	5,976	6,884	6,014	5,894	5,762	6,008	5,793	6,607
February	5,197	5,385	4,944	4,958	5,218	5,274	4,913	4,884	4,964	4,817
March	5,943	5,539	5,507	5,091	5,046	5,343	6,084	5,355	5,507	4,570
April	5,112	5,088	4,827	5,276	5,451	5,040	5,361	4,744	4,722	4,893
May	4,704	5,387	5,328	5,144	4,974	4,666	5,049	4,937	5,232	4,742
June	5,109	4,825	5,010	4,685	4,466	4,962	4,948	4,706	4,684	4,066
July	4,758	4,488	4,689	4,805	4,861	4,684	4,571	4,345	5,663	4,689
August	4,585	5,075	4,823	4,734	4,500	4,630	4,921	4,753	4,571	4,325
September	4,753	4,689	4,622	4,198	4,453	4,710	4,722	4,786	4,371	4,219
October	5,137	4,891	5,158	5,211	5,328	4,960	4,930	4,854	5,046	4,818
November	5,191	5,329	5,659	4,960	5,024	5,117	6,531	4,710	5,086	4,364
December	5,784	5,652	8,564	5,581	5,706	5,657	6,257	5,246	5,861	5,350
Total	62,014	61,957	65,017	61,527	61,041	60,937	64,049	59,328	61,500	57,460
Age 65 and over										
January	4,399	4,332	4,509	5,425	4,771	4,692	4,597	4,802	4,576	5,339
February	4,047	4,171	3,841	3,858	4,142	4,228	3,908	3,853	3,970	3,828
March	4,605	4,298	4,327	4,027	4,001	4,204	4,885	4,274	4,408	3,611
April	3,863	3,953	3,762	4,078	4,314	4,000	4,269	3,776	3,797	3,828
May	3,563	4,117	4,131	3,972	3,863	3,639	4,005	3,883	4,105	3,671
June	3,914	3,668	3,854	3,603	3,449	3,830	3,840	3,638	3,672	3,172
July	3,628	3,410	3,618	3,665	3,757	3,630	3,615	3,356	4,663	3,635
August	3,457	3,828	3,667	3,636	3,447	3,623	3,862	3,694	3,555	3,349
September	3,610	3,503	3,592	3,231	3,431	3,634	3,657	3,737	3,399	3,270
October	3,955	3,771	4,018	4,082	4,179	3,886	3,905	3,812	4,002	3,727
November	3,924	4,051	4,316	3,928	3,957	4,043	5,377	3,691	4,041	3,446
December	4,455	4,320	7,134	4,422	4,470	4,528	5,031	4,202	4,787	4,237
Total	47,420	47,422	50,769	47,927	47,781	47,937	50,951	46,718	48,975	45,113

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths there were in each January from 1992 to 1997 from *(a)* influenza, *(b)* pneumonia and *(c)* bronchitis. [17116]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total number of deaths in January from the specified causes is given in the table. The figures for 1996 are still provisional and figures for 1997 are not yet available.

Deaths in January from selected causes, 1992–96

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
(a) Influenza[1]	12	3	5	3	27
(b) Pneumonia[2]	469	401	508	420	742
(c) Bronchitis[3]	43	38	33	30	32

[1] WHO International Classification of Diseases, code 487.
[2] WHO International Classification of Diseases, codes 480–486.
[3] WHO International Classification of Diseases, codes 466, 490–491.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what have been the excess weekly mortality rates in Scotland for *(a)* December 1996 and *(b)* January 1997 in terms of numbers; and what were the average weekly figures for similar periods in the previous five years. [17204]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is no universally accepted definition of excess mortality. The number of deaths in Scotland in December and January for the years 1992 to 1997 are given in the table. The 1996 and 1997 figures are still provisional. The average weekly deaths for 1992 to 1996 are also given.

Deaths in Scotland in December and January by week 1992 to 1997

Week beginning	*Number*
1991–92	
2 December 1991	1,127
9 December 1991	1,235
16 December 1991	1,313
23 December 1991	1,357
30 December 1991	1,335
6 January 1992	1,388
13 January 1992	1,275
20 January 1992	1,297
27 January 1992	1,351
1992–93	
7 December 1992	1,217
14 December 1992	1,237
21 December 1992	1,293
28 December 1992	1,403
4 January 1993	1,354
11 January 1993	1,454
18 January 1993	1,391
25 January 1993	1,283
1993–94	
6 December 1993	1,296
13 December 1993	1,389
20 December 1993	1,498
27 December 1993	1,454
3 January 1994	1,494
10 January 1994	1,368
17 January 1994	1,293
24 January 1994	1,242
31 January 1994	1,267
1994–95	
5 December 1994	1,213
12 December 1994	1,189
19 December 1994	1,245
26 December 1994	1,323
2 January 1995	1,330
9 January 1995	1,301
16 January 1995	1,281
23 January 1995	1,229
30 January 1995	1,194
1995–96	
4 December 1995	1,296
11 December 1995	1,399
18 December 1995	1,454
25 December 1995	1,738
1 January 1996	1,823
8 January 1996	1,541
15 January 1996	1,364
22 January 1996	1,293
29 January 1996	1,207
1996–97	
2 December 1996	1,127
9 December 1996	1,195
16 December 1996	1,281
23 December 1996	1,364
30 December 1996	1,594
6 January 1997	1,626
13 January 1997	1,593
20 January 1997	1,401
27 January 1997	1,271

Average weekly deaths in Scotland 1992 to 1996

1992: 1,172

1993: 1,232

1994: 1,141

1995: 1,163

1996: 1,150

Cold-related Illnesses

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland received treatment by NHS doctors for cold-related illnesses for the periods December 1996 and January 1997; and what was the average figure for similar periods in each of the past 10 years. [17216]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what have been the excess winter treatment rates for cold-related illnesses in hospitals in Scotland for *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients for each of the last 10 years. [17215]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In-patient admissions with a main diagnosis of cold-related illness—influenza, pneumonia and bronchitis—for the months of December to February and for the rest of each of the past 10 years are given in the table, together with the ratio of the December to February figures to the three-monthly average for the rest of the year. Information on out-patients is not held centrally.

Admissions to hospital with a main diagnosis of influenza, pneumonia or bronchitis for the periods March 1985 to February 1986 to March 1995 to February 1996

	Influenza *Number of admissions*			*Pneumonia* *Number of admissions*			*Bronchitis* *Number of admissions*		
Period March to February	*Rest of year March to November*	*Winter period December to February*	*Excess winter admissions ratio*[1]	*Rest of year March to November*	*Winter period December to February*	*Excess winter admissions Ratio*[1]	*Rest of year March to November*	*Winter period December to February*	*Excess winter admissions ratio*[1]
1985–86	174	155	2.7	5,193	2,669	1.5	3,185	1,839	1.7
1986–87	121	96	2.4	5,232	2,088	1.2	2,322	1,739	2.2
1987–88	118	32	0.8	5,293	2,111	1.2	2,472	1,074	1.3
1988–89	98	99	3.0	5,286	1,982	1.1	2,894	1,339	1.4
1989–90	202	451	6.7	5,544	2,981	1.6	2,130	2,294	3.2
1990–91	114	56	1.5	5,501	2,499	1.4	2,040	1,295	1.9
1991–92	83	123	4.4	5,739	2,606	1.4	2,662	2,297	2.6
1992–93	77	56	2.2	5,638	2,447	1.3	2,229	1,902	2.6
1993–94	501	90	0.5	7,158	2,822	1.2	3,257	2,114	1.9
1994–95	78	34	1.3	6,323	2,846	1.4	2,019	2,139	3.2
1995–96	163	237	4.4	6,772	3,481	1.5	2,331	2,574	3.3
Total 1985–96	1,729	1,429	2.5	63,679	28,532	1.3	27,541	20,606	2.2

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland received hospital treatment as *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients for cold-related illnesses for the period December 1996 and January 1997; and what was the average figure for similar periods in the past 10 years. [17219]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on in-patient admissions with a main diagnosis of cold-related illness—influenza, pneumonia or bronchitis—for December 1996 to January 1997 is not yet available. The table provides information for the 10 year period to January 1996. Information on out-patients is not held centrally.

NHSiS—Admissions to hospital with a main diagnosis of influenza, pneumonia or bronchitis

Periods December and January 1985 to 1996

	Influenza		*Pneumonia*		*Bronchitis*		
Year	*December*	*January*	*December*	*January*	*December*	*January*	*Total*
1985–86	42	79	847	1,041	596	350	2,955
1986–87	9	35	662	713	226	435	2,080
1987–88	11	12	736	742	155	173	1,829
1988–89	46	39	771	676	522	229	2,283
1989–90	369	58	1,413	913	590	798	4,141
1990–91	14	16	848	923	230	236	2,267
1991–92	23	57	831	960	654	634	3,159
1992–93	12	11	791	862	331	492	2,499
1993–94	47	35	1,098	990	846	613	3,629
1994–95	12	6	994	1,044	717	627	3,400
1995–96	143	72	1,414	1,244	903	761	4,537

Ambulance Service Training Courses

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in respect of the Scottish ambulance service management training courses at Barony castle, *(a)* how many people have participated in the courses, *(b)* what guidelines are issued to those participating, *(c)* what provision there is for opting out of courses or part of courses and *(d)* what equipment is available in the event of medical emergencies. [17134]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Forty-two operational managers have completed 10 or 12-day classroom-based management training courses, which include a two-day outdoor module; a further 20 operational managers participated in the most recent course, which was suspended on 15 February.

(b) Course participants receive a comprehensive two-hour briefing for the two-day outdoor module. This includes guidance on safety, communication arrangements, map reading skills and the country code.

(c) The Scottish Ambulance Service NHS Trust attaches the highest priority to the need for formal management training where previously there was none. Accordingly, it would normally expect operational ambulance managers to take part in its management training programme. The leadership element of the course was designed by external consultants

to be physically achievable, even by those of moderate fitness. Despite this, students are encouraged to express any doubts or concerns they may have about participating in the outdoor activities and there have been occasions when alternative arrangements have been made at the request of individuals unable to complete this element of the course.

(d) During the outdoor module each of the walking groups is accompanied by a safety supervisor who has a first aid kit consisting of dressings and plasters, a walkie-talkie radio, mobile phone, flares, strobe light and portable cooker. Every member of each group is also equipped with various items of survival equipment. The groups use as a base a cottage equipped with modern amenities and a patient transport vehicle carrying emergency response equipment and drugs, a stretcher and blankets. A 4-wheel drive vehicle is also available at the cottage.

The trust has suspended the course and is carrying out a full review of it, in light of the death of one of the participants on 15 February.

M74

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, columns *481–82*, on junctions on the M74 motorway, how many entry-exit junctions are planned to be included over the proposed M74 route from Carlisle to Glasgow. [17046]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There will be a total of 19 junctions on the completed motorway between the M6 junction 44 at Carlisle and the Maryville interchange, inclusive.

Braer Oil Spill

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current estimate of the costs incurred by his Department and agencies for which his Department is responsible in the clearing-up operation which followed the grounding of the MV Braer on Shetland in January 1993. [17699]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The clearing-up operation was undertaken on behalf of the Government by the Department of Transport. The costs incurred by my Department related primarily to testing and monitoring for traces of oil and amounted to some £900,000.

Electoral Register

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the current number of electors in each parliamentary constituency in Scotland. [17539]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: For the latest information held centrally I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) on 6 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns *690–93*.

Law Reform Projects

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals the Scottish Law Commission has for future law reform projects. [18210]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Lord Advocate has recently agreed with the Scottish Law Commission a fifth programme of law reform. This was presented to Parliament yesterday and is published today. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The new programme, which supersedes the existing four programmes, describes the short, medium and long-term projects on which the commission will be working between now and the end of 1999. Timetables are set for the short and medium-term projects.

The centrepiece of the projects in the fifth programme is the commission's work on property, including feudal tenure reform and reform of the law of the tenement. Recommendations on the law of the tenement are expected before the end of 1997 and on feudal tenure reform before the end of 1999. Other matters on which recommendations are expected before the end of 1997 include diligence on the dependence and admiralty arrestments and unjustified enrichment.

The Government welcome this programme which concentrates on a number of important ant timely law reform projects. The fixing of priorities and timetables is particularly welcome and will help all of those with an interest in law reform to keep track of and prepare for changes in the law which the commission might recommend.

Leasehold Casualties

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of state for Scotland what plans he has to reform the law on leasehold casualties in Scotland. [18244]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: In view of the difficulties which are being caused to some tenants by the operation of the existing law on leasehold casualties, my right hon. Friend has formally written to the Scottish Law Commission asking commissioners:

"To consider the law on leasehold casualties and advise on possible reforms".

I hope that the commission will be able to consult and report by March 1998.

Homelessness

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were accepted as homeless by each local authority in Scotland for each year since 1990. [17230]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The available information is set out in the table.

Households accepted as homeless under the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987

Local authority	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Berwickshire	15	22	30	36	21
Ettrick and Lauderdale	22	33	49	51	38
Roxburgh	58	44	80	92	126
Tweeddale	31	36	42	30	31
Clackmannan	206	131	116	70	81
Falkirk	613	400	606	486	510
Stirling	284	322	423	448	586
Annandale and Eskdale	57	27	47	52	32
Nithsdale	256	186	152	88	85
Stewartry	85	55	81	85	78
Wigtown	101	123	120	152	84
Dunfermline	191	295	294	169	162
Kirkcaldy	492	659	581	439	331

Households accepted as homeless under the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987

Local authority	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
North East Fife	187	253	247	259	193
Aberdeen	941	1,296	1,354	1,243	713
Banff and Buchan	202	302	347	357	272
Gordon	183	249	239	227	220
Kincardine and Deeside	44	33	81	108	117
Moray	101	127	155	135	352
Badenoch and Strathspey	19	31	15	32	16
Caithness	6	11	12	22	9
Inverness	174	141	121	155	331
Lochaber	46	63	66	49	58
Nairn	19	26	38	17	27
Ross and Cromarty	80	101	119	83	49
Skye and Lochalsh	22	32	30	17	18
Sutherland	7	14	5	2	—
East Lothian	328	324	314	237	238
Edinburgh	2,195	2,364	2,704	2,635	2,342
Midlothian	71	76	148	148	220
West Lothian	200	486	804	440	575
Argyll and Bute	164	138	156	164	112
Bearsden and Milngavie	51	24	34	32	39
Clydebank	207	233	224	133	57
Clydesdale	188	301	292	233	118
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	219	228	178	178	141
Cumnock and Doon Valley	47	54	81	96	88
Cunninghame	230	258	227	187	168
Dumbarton	449	474	439	301	334
East Kilbride	350	382	373	364	408
Eastwood	8	9	8	9	17
Glasgow	4,609	5,429	5,881	6,629	6,145
Hamilton	192	176	251	206	97
Inverclyde	143	140	121	139	137
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	118	106	110	98	77
Kyle and Carrick	308	316	245	251	239
Monklands	112	138	102	199	225
Motherwell	254	134	165	231	218
Renfrew	694	923	753	583	513
Strathkelvin	237	287	233	217	166
Angus	212	239	281	224	227
Dundee	430	380	350	339	400
Perth and Kinross	303	332	815	468	327
Orkney	21	19	25	32	87
Shetland	39	102	55	47	35
Western Isles	35	90	124	167	143
Total	16,856	19,174	20,943	19,891	18,435

Notes:

1. The term "accepted" has been taken to include households assessed as homeless or likely to become homeless within 28 days for whom the local authority secured that accommodation was available. The figures given include cases where the authority has taken action to ensure that the household can retain or return to its present or previous accommodation.
2. The figures given are taken from detailed individual case returns which are available for around 95 per cent. of applications, though the proportion varies between local authorities.

Source:

Local authorities.

Offshore Installations

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals the Government have to require operators to clean up the sea bed around offshore installations on the UK continental shelf. [17000]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* Removal of installations and any debris will be addressed at end of field life in the abandonment programme approved by the Department of Trade and Industry. In addition, part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 includes powers to take action in response to instances of illegal dumping.

In relation to operational discharges from offshore installations, a recent study funded jointly by the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association and the Department of Trade and Industry identified a range of options for dealing with drill cuttings piles at the decommissioning stage. All the options require further investigation and the Government are considering how this might best be undertaken.

Human Growth Hormone

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland *(a)* before 1 July 1977 and *(b)* after 1 July 1977 have (i) received human growth hormone treatment, (ii) died as a result of human growth hormone treatment, and (iii) been diagnosed as ill as a result of human growth hormone treatment; and how many court actions have been raised, or are currently pending, as a result of death or illness following such treatment. [17261]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 25 February 1997]:* The Institute of Child Health holds and is continuing to develop a UK register of patients treated with pituitary-derived human growth hormone. The current register does not identify separately whether treatment took place before or after 1 July 1977. In total, 144 patients received pituitary-derived human growth hormone at treatment centres in Scotland. Four of these have subsequently died from Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. None of the remaining patients is currently known to be suffering from the disease. I am not aware of any legal actions on this mater raised in the Scottish courts. Two actions including an appeal are currently pending at the High Court in England.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Rape and Sexual Violence (Prosecutions)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General what factors underlie the recent decline in prosecutions for rape and sexual violence; and if he will make a statement. [16656]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service's case work statistics do not separately record the number of prosecutions for offences of rape and sexual violence. The table shows the Home Office statistics for prosecutions of offences in rape, indecent assault on a female, unlawful sexual intercourse and buggery in England and Wales. The total number of prosecutions in 1995 was 5,715, compared with 6,276 in 1994.

The reason for this reduction is not known. The Home Office is conducting a major research project into rape cases.

Table A: Persons prosecuted at the magistrates' courts for specific casual offences—1985 to 1995

England and Wales

	Buggery	*Rape*	*Indecent assault on a female*	*USI[1] with girl under 13*	*USI[1] with girl under 16*
1985	289	844	2,556	138	407
1986	266	927	2,592	129	368
1987	329	1,048	3,131	155	360
1988	423	1,288	3,414	165	345
1989	376	1,400	3,646	139	290
1990	413	1,467	3,804	146	292
1991	402	1,711	3,659	155	254
1992	426	1,648	3,627	112	254
1993	371	1,704	3,639	97	189
1994	410	1,782	3,794	88	202
1995	245	1,641	3,557	77	195

[1] Unlawful sexual intercourse.

Source:

Crime and Criminal Justice Unit (CCJU), Home Office.

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Attorney-General how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16792]

The Attorney-General: A list of the number of written and oral questions answered by my Department in the Sessions 1982–83 to 1995–96, as supplied by the parliamentary on-line information service unit, has been placed in the House Library. Figures for 1979–80 to 1981–82 are not available.

The number of replies given by my Department stating that information could be provided only at disproportionate cost, or was not available centrally, was eight in the Session 1995–96, plus five instances where part of the information requested was available. Details of replies given in previous Sessions could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17059]

The Attorney-General: Information on items stolen or otherwise unaccounted for during the 12 months to 31 January 1997 is as follows for my Departments and agencies:

Crown Prosecution Service

1. Non-IT equipment and furniture:

Eleven items were stolen, at a total cost of £1,884.

Five items were otherwise unaccounted for, at a total cost of £85.

2. IT equipment:

Fifteen items were stolen (including one file server valued at £5,000), at a total cost of £21,755.

Serious Fraud Office

Two non-IT items were reported as stolen or otherwise unaccounted for, at a total value of £140.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

Two non-IT items were stolen, at a total value of £60.

Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers

One lap-top computer was stolen, cost £2,000.

Government Property Lawyers

Nil.

TREASURY

Short-term Financial Assets

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the present total of short-term financial assets held by the Government; if he will list the major categories of such short-term financial assets held; and if he will make a statement. [17183]

Mr. Jack: Identifiable short-term financial assets of central Government were over £8 billion at the end of September 1996. These assets consisted of sterling bank deposits, £6.7 billion; foreign currency bank deposits, £500 million; and holdings of short-dated bills by the issue department of the Bank of England, £900 million. Non-identifiable short-term financial assets include a proportion of the official reserves—the total value of which was £28½ billion at the end of September 1996—and of Government holdings of local authority and public corporation debt—£42 billion and £21 billion, respectively. Figures for the maturity structure of these assets could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Government debt, net of financial assets, was reduced by nearly £6 billion in January. This was the largest repayment of debt in a single month for eight years.

Money Supply and Inflation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his assessment of the relationship between the money supply and the future rate of inflation. [17647]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government consider all the relevant information when assessing the prospects for inflation up to two years ahead. The growth of the money supply is just one of the many indicators examined when making this assessment. The relationship between money growth and inflation has varied considerably in the past, for instance when financial markets were liberalised in the 1980s.

Privatisation (Advertising)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost has been of advertising each privatisation since 1979. [17642]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 25 February 1997]:* The table shows the cost to the Government of advertising in each privatisation or secondary sale since British Telecom, in 1984. The overall cost represents 0.29 per cent. of aggregate proceeds from these sales. Information on advertising costs of earlier sales is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Advertising costs in privatisations

Share offer	*Year*	*Costs (ex VAT) £ million*
BT1	1985	9.7
Britoil	1985	3.0
Cable and Wireless	1985	2.2
British Aerospace	1985	1.7
British Gas	1986	21.4
British Airways	1987	2.8
Rolls Royce	1987	1.6
BAA	1987	4.9
BP	1987	18.3
British Steel	1988	4.9
Water	1989	17.3
Regional Electricity Companies	1990	20.6
Generating Companies 1	1991	8.1
Scottish Electricity Companies	1991	5.3
BT2	1991	14.7
Northern Ireland Electricity	1993	1.1
BT3	1993	11.9
Generating Companies 2	1995	8.0
Railtrack	1996	4.4
British Energy	1996	4.1

Deaths (Respiratory Illness)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, columns *376–77*, on what approximate date he expects the completed figures for January 1997 deaths from pneumonia, influenza and bronchitis to be available; and if he will make arrangements for the completed figures to be placed in the Library. [17254]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Rhodri Morgan, dated 26 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent question concerning the approximate date when he expects the completed figures for January 1997 deaths from pneumonia, influenza and bronchitis to be available, and whether he will make arrangements for the completed figures to be placed in the Library.

Final figures on monthly deaths from pneumonia, influenza and bronchitis will not be available in published form until the end of 1998. Reasonably usable (unpublished) data for deaths in January 1997 from these conditions should be available by the end of March 1997. These should differ only slightly from the definitive figures to be published next year.

Whereas it would be possible to give a virtually complete figure for deaths registered in January 1997, figures for actual occurrences in January would be low because of the delay between the event and its registration. The registration figures for January would include deaths that occurred in the preceding December and earlier.

I hope this reply has been helpful.

Full-time Permanent Jobs

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many full-time permanent jobs have been *(a)* lost and *(b)* created in each of the past 10 years; [17455]

(2) what is his Department's estimate of the number of full-time permanent jobs which will be created over the next five years. [17468]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 26 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions in which you asked about the number of full-time permanent jobs lost or created in each of the last ten years together with projection for the next five years.

Information is available only for the net change in employees between 1986 and 1996. This is provided in the attached table. The Office for National Statistics does not produce projections of employment levels.

Full-time permanent employees in Great Britain: at spring (Unadjusted, thousands)

	Level	*Net change*
1986	15,792	—
1987	15,750	–42
1988	16,316	566
1989	16,704	388
1990	16,879	175
1991	16,529	–350
1992	15,626	–904
1993	15,322	–303
1994	15,232	–91
1995	15,355	123
1996	15,451	97

Source:
ONS, Labour Force Survey.

Gastroschisis

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the incidence of gastroschisis per 1,000 births for each health authority area for the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement; [17276]

(2) if he will list the number of cases of gastroschisis per 1,000 births in each year since 1970. [17278]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. John Austin-Walker, dated 26 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent question concerning the number of cases of gatroschisis per 1,000 births in each year since 1970.

The table below shows data for Anomalies of Abdominal wall (International Classification of Diseases 9th revision code 756.7) which include exomphalos, gastroschisis and prune belly

(syndrome). Gastroschisis figures are only available separately at a disproportionate cost. The data are shown from 1979, as before then it was not available on a comparable basis. The rates are calculated per 10,000 live/stillbirths.

Number of cases and rates[1] for anomalies of abdominal wall in England and Wales, 1979 to 1993

Year	*Number of cases*	*Rates[1]*
1979	188	2.9
1980	184	2.8
1981	166	2.6
1982	162	2.6
1983	168	2.7
1984	122	1.9
1985	126	1.9
1986	125	1.9
1987	134	2.0
1988	147	2.1
1989	133	1.9
1990	174	2.5
1991	165	2.3
1992	144	2.1
1993	149	2.2

[1] Rates per 10,000 live/stillbirths.

You also asked for the incidence of gastroschisis per 1,000 births for each health authority area for the most recent year for which figures are available. This information is available in Table 4A of the Annual Reference Volume publication: Series MB3 no. 9 Congenital Malformation Statistics 1993, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

The table shows data for Anomalies of abdominal wall (International Classification of Disease 9th revision code 756.7) under the heading of exomphalos, gastroschisis. Again, figures dealing solely with gastroschisis are not available except at disproportionate cost.

I hope this reply has been helpful.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Civil Disturbances (Deaths)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons were killed in Northern Ireland due to the civil disturbances between 12 August 1970 and 11 February 1992; and how many of these deaths have been attributed to the Provisional IRA. [15341]

Sir John Wheeler: Deaths due to the security situation between 12 August 1970 to 11 February 1992 totalled 2,952.

Attribution to specific organisations is not available, but 1,746 of the above deaths have been attributed to republican organisations.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment his Department had made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16313]

Mr. Moss: The policy statement on green housekeeping for all Northern Ireland Departments published in March 1993 requires the removal of all materials containing asbestos products from Northern Ireland civil service buildings whenever they present a hazard and also requires the use of alternative materials in all future building projects carried out for the service. It also requires that the use of products containing chlorofluorocarbons, halons, carbon tetrachloride or 1.1.1. trichloroethane are eliminated in the Northern Ireland civil service. Additionally, suppliers of goods and services are required to comply with the guidance set out in the publication "Selling to Government" produced by the Department of the Environment. This contains specifications about hazardous materials and ozone-depleting substances and all Departments are obliged to comply with these requirements.

Departments have in place safety management systems which promote the concept of risk assessment. Within this system, premises are assessed for hazardous materials.

Specific assessments include compliance with:

1. COSHH

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995.

2. Asbestos

Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1988.

The assessments are reviewed on an annual or bi-annual basis to ensure that they are valid.

The policy of NI Departments on ozone-depleting substances is that they are no longer purchased and that they be reduced and ultimately their use in government buildings eliminated. Fire extinguishers containing halon are being removed, disposed of safely and replaced with ozone-friendly alternatives. There is a programme of replacement of fridges and freezers which contain CFCs and only CFC-free insulation materials are used.

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16786]

Sir John Wheeler: Figures for the Sessions 1979–80 to 1981–82 are not available. A list of the number of written and oral Parliamentary questions answered by this Department in the Sessions 1982–83 to 1995–96, as supplied by the parliamentary on-line information service unit, has been placed in the Library.

The rest of the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Area Plans

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 5 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *478*, when the reviews and work on the area plans in respect of the Down and Newry and Mourne district council areas will take place. [16992]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. Eddie McGrady, dated 26 February 1997:

Mr. Moss has asked me to reply to your Question about when the review and work in respect of the area plans for the Down and Newry and Mourne District Council areas will take place.

The Area Plan programme for 1997/98 has not yet been finalised. However, I can assure you that the matter is being actively considered, and a decision is expected shortly. I will, of course, write to you when the programme has been agreed, to let you know the position.

Mortality Rates

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what have been the excess weekly mortality rates in Northern Ireland for *(a)* December 1996 and *(b)* January 1997 in terms of numbers; and what was the average figure for similar periods in the past five years; [17205]

(2) what have been the excess mortality rates in Northern Ireland for each of the last 10 years expressed *(a)* in excess numbers and *(b)* as percentages; [17433]

(3) what have been the excess winter mortality rates in Northern Ireland for each of the past 10 years in terms of *(a)* excess numbers and *(b)* percentages for (i) people over the age of 65 years, (ii) single–parent families, (iii) people in receipt of income support, (iv) people with disabilities and (v) others. [17472]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Statistics and Research Agency under its chief executive, Mr. E. F. Jardine. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. F. Jardine to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 26 February 1997:

You recently tabled three questions asking the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for information on excess deaths in Northern Ireland as a result of winter hardship.

The first of these questions (347, tabled on 19 February) asked, what have been the excess weekly mortality rates in Northern Ireland for *(a)* December 1996 and *(b)* January 1997 in terms of numbers; and how these compare with the weekly death rates for the same period in each of the previous five years.

As deaths data from 1996 onwards have still to be finally collated, I am unable to supply you with the information you have requested for the months of December 1996 and January 1997.

Average weekly mortality rates for the months of December and January in the five years previous to those specifically requested are shown in Table 1 below. This table also details the annual average weekly mortality rates over the period in question and the resultant excess rates for January and December.

Table 1: January and December excesses in average weekly mortality rates

Rates per 1,000 population

Year	December average weekly mortality rate	January average weekly mortality rate	Annual average weekly mortality rate	Excess December rate	Excess January rate
Winter 1994–95	0.19	0.20	0.17	0.02	0.03
Winter 1993–94	0.22	0.21	0.17	0.05	0.04
Winter 1992–93	0.19	0.18	0.18	0.01	0.00
Winter 1991–92	0.19	0.19	0.17	0.02	0.02
Winter 1990–91	0.22	0.23	0.17	0.05	0.06

Your second and third questions (359 and 363, tabled on 20 February) asked, what have been the excess mortality rates in Northern Ireland for each of the last 10 years expressed *(a)* in excess numbers and *(b)* as percentages, and, what have been the excess winter mortality rates in Northern Ireland for each of the past 10 years in terms of *(a)* excess numbers and *(b)* percentages for (i) people over the age of 65 years, (ii) single parent families, (iii) people in receipt of income support, (iv) people with disabilities and (v) all other people not included in the above.

The mortality rates requested are shown in Tables 2, 3 and 4 below. For the purpose of this exercise winter has been taken to mean the four month period extending form December to March.

Table 2: Excess winter mortality rates—all persons

Rates per 1,000 population

Year	Average mortality rate for Winter period December to March	Average mortality rate per 4 month period	Excess mortality rate over Winter period	Excess Winter deaths as a percentage of 4 monthly average
Winter 1994–95	3.34	3.06	0.29	9
Winter 1993–94	3.40	3.06	0.35	11
Winter 1992–93	3.19	3.18	0.01	0
Winter 1991–92	3.38	3.07	0.31	10
Winter 1990–91	3.66	3.09	0.57	18
Winter 1989–90	4.11	3.15	0.96	31
Winter 1988–89	3.38	3.40	–0.02	–1
Winter 1987–88	3.69	3.30	0.39	12
Winter 1986–87	3.43	3.26	0.16	5
Winter 1985–86	4.01	3.39	0.62	18

Table 3: Excess winter mortality rates—persons over the age of 65 years

Rates per 1,000 populations

Year	Average mortality rate for Winter period December to March	Average mortality rate per 4 month period	Excess mortality rate over Winter period	Excess winter deaths as a percentage 4 monthly average
Winter 1994–95	22.26	19.98	2.28	11
Winter 1993–94	22.40	19.81	2.59	13
Winter 1992–93	20.95	20.66	0.30	1
Winter 1991–92	22.38	20.07	2.31	11
Winter 1990–91	24.28	19.98	4.30	22
Winter 1989–90	28.57	20.88	7.69	37
Winter 1988–89	22.53	22.74	–0.21	–1
Winter 1987–88	24.70	21.65	3.05	14
Winter 1986–87	22.88	21.44	1.44	7
Winter 1985–86	27.41	22.39	5.02	22

Table 4: Excess winter mortality rates—persons aged 0–65 years

Rates per 1,000 population

Year	Average mortality rate for Winter period December to March	Average mortality rate per 4 month period	Excess mortality rate over Winter period	Excess Winter deaths as a percentage of 4 monthly savings
Winter 1994–95	0.77	0.76	0.01	2
Winter 1993–94	0.83	0.79	0.04	6
Winter 1992–93	0.78	0.81	–0.03	–4

Table 4: Excess winter mortality rates—persons aged 0–65 years

Rates per 1,000 population

Year	Average mortality rate for Winter period December to March	Average mortality rate per 4 month period	Excess mortality rate over Winter period	Excess Winter deaths as a percentage of 4 monthly savings
Winter 1991–92	0.81	0.78	0.04	5
Winter 1990–91	0.89	0.82	0.06	8
Winter 1989–90	0.95	0.86	0.09	11
Winter 1988–89	0.91	0.91	0.00	0
Winter 1987–88	1.00	0.95	0.05	5
Winter 1986–87	0.96	0.96	0.00	0
Winter 1985–86	1.08	1.01	0.07	7

The mortality rates shown in these tables are based on date of occurrences of death and broadly take account of deaths registered within one year of death. In Tables 2, 3, and 4 1996 death registrations for deaths occurring in 1995 have been estimated.

There is no information available on death rates for single parents, people in receipt of income support or people with disabilities.

I trust this information is sufficient and if I can be of further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Prospect Downs Development

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when work commenced on the housing development known as Prospect Downs, Carrickfergus; and when house building on this estate was completed. [17047]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is not held centrally by the Department or by any of its agencies. Information received from the building control department of Carrickfergus borough council, however, indicates that development in the Prospect area of Carrickfergus commenced late in 1975 and continued through to late 1994. The works were carried out in several phases by a number of different developers.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will publish a breakdown of expenditure by the *(a)* Department of Education, *(b)* Department of Economic Development, *(c)* Department of the Environment, *(d)* Department of Health and Social Services and *(e)* Department of Finance and Personnel in each parliamentary constituency in each of the past three months; [17303]

(2) if he will publish a breakdown of proposed expenditure by the *(a)* Department of Education, *(b)* Department of Economic Development, *(c)* Department of the Environment, *(d)* Department of Health and Social Services and *(e)* Department of Finance and Personnel in each parliamentary constituency for the next two months. [17304]

Sir John Wheeler: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Nature Reserves (Contracting Out)

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the impact on *(a)* job numbers, *(b)* consistency of management, *(c)* management expertise, *(d)* the United Kingdom's commitment to biodiversity made at the Rio summit and *(e)* accountability of the contracting out of the management and maintenance of Northern Ireland's national nature reserves. [17387]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Environment and Heritage Service under its chief executive, Mr. Robert C. Martin. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Robert C. Martin to Mr. Eric Illsley, dated 26 February 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Environment and Heritage Service, I am responsible for operational aspects of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland's work on nature reserves.

I am therefore responding to the Parliamentary Question which you put down in the House of Commons:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what assessment he has made of the impact on (a) job numbers, (b) consistency of management, (c) management expertise, (d) the United Kingdom's commitment to biodiversity made at the Rio Summit and (e) accountability of the contracting out of the management and maintenance of Northern Ireland's National Nature Reserves."

The Prior Options Study leading to the creation of the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) as a next steps agency took into consideration the four strategies published in January 1994 as apart of the government's follow-up action to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at Rio de Janeiro. The Study determined that it was not inconsistent with those strategies to explore whether any non-government body would have the expertise to manage and maintain Northern Ireland's National Nature Reserves.

Management/Operational plans for each Reserve are currently being devised following which those bodies which have declared an interest will be assessed to determine whether they have the expertise to carry out the plan effectively, efficiently and economically. No property will be transferred unless I and my Directors are satisfied that the transferee has the necessary expertise and capacity to care for the property. Accountability for management and maintenance will remain with the EHS.

No jobs will be lost as a result of any transfer.

Electoral Register

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the current number of electors in each parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland. [17538]

Mr. Ancram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) on Monday 24 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns *95–96*.

Magheramorne Landfill Project

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to which individual or organisation his Department is paying the costs associated with the hire of the consultant mentioned in his answer to the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) of 27 January, *Official Report*, columns *53–54*; and what those costs are. [17628]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Environment and Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. Robert C. Martin. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Robert C. Martin to Mr. Jim Dowd, dated 26 February 1997:

As Chief executive of the Environment and Heritage Service I am responsible for all operational aspects of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland's environment policies.

I am therefore responding to the Parliamentary Question No. 376 which you put down in the House of Commons:-

> "To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to which individual or organisation his Department is paying the costs associated with the hire of the consultant mentioned in his Answer to the honourable member for East Antrim of 27th January, Official report, columns 53–4; and what those costs are."

The successful competitive tender for the contract for the provision of Preliminary Waste Strategy and Site Audit Specification was Haul Waste Ltd who nominated a single consultant to carry out the work. Payments for the services of that individual are made to Haul Waste Ltd at a rate of £9,500 per four months.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Swan Hunter (Privatisation)

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade under what statutory basis the Swan Hunter shipbuilding yard was privatised; and if he will make a statement on the degree of indemnity given to *(a)* the new owners, *(b)* the shareholders and *(c)* the new company officials against claims for (i) faulty design and (ii) poor construction conducted on vessels built during the period of public ownership. [15567]

Mr. Greg Knight: The Swan Hunter shipbuilding yard was privatised under the terms of the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Act 1977, as amended by the British Shipbuilders Act 1983, which regulates the activities of British Shipbuilders. An indemnity was given by British Shipbuilders to the purchasers of Swan Hunter Shipbuilders Ltd. on 20 January 1986. This indemnity, in brief, relates to demands, claims, liabilities, costs and expenses relating to vessels constructed by Swan Hunter Shipbuilders Ltd. prior to completion of privatisation, and other work carried out prior to completion, excluding work in progress. The indemnity does not cover the new company officials at Swan Hunter.

Low Pay

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the proposal of the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) in relation to low pay expressed in the debate on the Queen's Speech of 23 October 1996, *Official Report*, column 87. [16070]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton that statutory pay fixing, such as a national minimum wage, would destroy many thousands of jobs. However, the proposal that low-paying employers could face legal sanctions would also place an unacceptable burden on companies and damage employment. We believe that pay is a matter to be decided by the parties concerned in light of their particular local circumstances. Businesses are best able to judge what they can afford to pay and what rates are needed to recruit, retain and motivate suitably qualified staff.

Overspill Surveillance Flights

Mr. Dunn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the overspill surveillance flights carried out on behalf of his Department. [18139]

Mr. Page: For the month of January 1997, no oil at all was detected by the surveillance aircraft employed by the DTI. Two hundred and eighty-four installations were surveyed during this time with aircraft and equipment capable of detecting, by day or by night, spills as small as a few litres. These results are confirmation of the offshore industry's continued good environmental performance.

The total amount of oil from positive detections in 1996 from 3,336 overflights was 5.67 tonnes. This is to be compared with natural seepage into the North sea of 1,000 tonnes each year and discharges from rivers amounting to about 30,000 tonnes.

Balance of Trade (European Union)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade with which European Union countries the United Kingdom had a surplus in trade in goods and trade in services, transfers and investment income in each of the most recent three years for which figures are available. [15935]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* The information requested is given.

Countries with which the UK had a surplus in each of the past three years and the year(s) of surplus:

Trade in goods	*Years of surplus*		
Belgium/Luxembourg	1993	1994	1995
Greece	1993	1994	1995
Ireland	1993	1994	1995
Netherlands	—	—	1995
Portugal	1993	—	1995
Spain	1993	1994	1995
Austria	—	1994	1995

Source:
ONS—Geographical breakdown of the balance of payments economic trends October 1996.

Trade in services	*Years of surplus*		
Belgium/Luxembourg	1993	1994	1995
Denmark	1993	1994	1995
Germany	1993	1994	1995
Ireland	1993	1994	1995
Italy	1993	1994	1995
Netherlands	1993	—	1995
Sweden	1993	1994	1995
Finland	1993	1994	1995

Source:
ONS—Geographical breakdown of the balance of payments economic trends October 1996.

Transfers	*Years of surplus*		
Germany	1993	1994	1995
Greece	1993	1994	1995
Sweden	1993	1994	1995
Finland	1993	1994	1995

Source:
ONS—Geographical breakdown of the balance of payments economic trends October 1996.

Investment income	*Years of surplus*		
Denmark	—	—	1995
Germany	—	1994	1995
Greece	1993	—	—
Ireland	1993	1994	1995
Italy	1993	1994	1995
Portugal	—	1994	1995
Sweden	1993	1994	1995
Finland	1993	1994	1995

Source:
ONS—Geographical breakdown of the balance of payments economic trends October 1996.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will rank the European Union countries by their balance in trade in goods with the rest of the European Union, based on figures for the latest available year (i) in pounds sterling and (ii) as a percentage of gross domestic product. [15936]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* The information requested is in the following table. For completeness, information is also included on the UK's balance of trade in services and in goods and services combined. For trade in services, data are not yet available for 1995 and the figures shown relate to 1993, which is the latest year for which an analysis of services earning by partner country is available. The country composition of the tables reflects EU membership at the time. Overall, the current account is close to balance and at its strongest for a decade.

EU countries balance of trade with other members of the European Union

Trade balance in goods (1995)

Ranked according to:	*£ billion*		*As a percentage of GDP*
Netherlands	28.6	Ireland	18.4
Germany	19.8	Netherlands	11.4
Belgium/Luxembourg	11.4	Belgium/Luxembourg	6.3
Ireland	7.5	Finland	3.3
Italy	5.0	Germany	1.3
Finland	2.6	Sweden	1.2
Sweden	1.8	Denmark	0.9
Denmark	1.0	Italy	0.7
Portugal	–3.7	France	–0.5
UK	–4.2	UK	–0.6
France	–5.3	Spain	–1.8
Spain	–6.4	Austria	–5.4
Greece	–6.8	Portugal	–5.9
Austria	–7.9	Greece	–9.3

Trade balance in services (1993)

	£ billion		*As a percentage of GDP*
Spain	6.9	Greece	4.2
France	4.8	Belgium/Luxembourg	3.1
Belgium/Luxembourg	4.6	Spain	2.1
Greece	2.0	Netherlands	0.9
Netherlands	1.8	Portugal	0.6
Italy	1.3	France	0.6
Portugal	0.3	Italy	0.2
Denmark	—.1	Denmark	–0.1
UK	—1.0	UK	–0.2
Germany	–15.2	Germany	–1.2
Ireland	n/a	Ireland	n/a

Trade balance in goods and services (1993)

	£ billion		*As a percentage of GDP*
Netherlands	19.4	Netherlands	9.4
Belgium/Luxembourg	13.1	Belgium/Luxembourg	8.9
Italy	6.8	Denmark	2.2
France	2.1	Italy	1.0
Denmark	2.0	Spain	0.5
Spain	1.6	France	0.3
Portugal	–3.6	Germany	–0.5
Greece	–3.6	UK	–0.8
UK	–5.3	Portugal	–6.2
Germany	–5.8	Greece	–7.4
Ireland	n/a	Ireland	n/a

Sources:
Eurostat Intra and Extra EU Trade.
Eurostat International Trade in Services.
HM C and E Business Monitor MA20.
OECD Main Economic Indicators.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will rank the European Union countries by their balance in trade in goods with countries outside the

European Union based on figures for the latest available year (i) in pounds sterling and (ii) as a percentage of gross domestic product. [15937]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* The information requested is in the following table. For completeness, information is also included on the UK's balance of trade in services and in goods and services combined. For trade in services, data are not yet available for 1995 and the figures shown relate to 1993 which is the latest year for which an analysis of services earning by partner country is available. The country composition of the tables reflects EU membership at the time. Overall the current account is close to balance and at its strongest for a decade.

EU countries balance of trade with countries outside the European Union

Trade balance in goods (1995)

Ranked according to	*£ billion*		*As a percentage of GDP*
Germany	22.2	Finland	5.5
France	12.8	Sweden	5.3
Italy	12.2	Denmark	2.1
Sweden	7.7	Italy	1.8
Finland	4.4	Austria	1.7
Austria	2.5	Germany	1.5
Denmark	2.3	France	1.3
Ireland	0.1	Ireland	0.3
Greece	–2.1	Spain	–0.8
Belgium/Luxembourg	–2.5	Belgium/Luxembourg	–1.4
Portugal	–2.5	UK	–1.5
Spain	–2.9	Greece	–2.9
UK	–10.4	Portugal	–4.0
Netherlands	–17.4	Netherlands	–6.9

Trade balance in services (1993)

	£ billion		*As a percentage of GDP*
France	7.2	Greece	4.1
UK	7.1	Denmark	1.9
Greece	2.0	UK	1.1
Denmark	1.7	France	0.9
Spain	1.5	Spain	0.5
Portugal	0.2	Portugal	0.4
Belgium/Luxembourg	–0.1	Belgium/Luxembourg	–0.1
Netherlands	–0.8	Italy	–0.2
Italy	–1.1	Netherlands	–0.4
Germany	–16.3	Germany	–1.3
Ireland	n/a	Ireland	n/a

Trade balance in goods and services (1993)

	£ billion		*As a percentage of GDP*
France	13.0	Denmark	4.2
Italy	7.4	France	1.6
Denmark	3.8	Italy	1.1
Germany	–0.8	Germany	–0.1
Greece	–1.4	Spain	–0.6
Portugal	–1.8	UK	–1.2
Spain	–1.8	Belgium/Luxembourg	–1.5
Belgium/Luxembourg	–2.1	Greece	–2.8
UK	–7.3	Portugal	–3.1
Netherlands	–10.3	Netherlands	–5.0
Ireland	n/a	Ireland	n/a

Trade balance in goods and services (1993)

Sources:
Eurostat Intra and Extra EU Trade.
Eurostat International Trade in Services.
HM C and E. Business Monitor MM20.
OECD Main Economic Indicators.

Reinsurance Companies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what inquiries the Serious Fraud Office has carried out *(a)* on its own behalf and *(b)* on the behalf of non-United Kingdom police and regulators into the affairs of Dai Ichi Kyoto, Kobe Reinsurance, North America Fidelity and CRM Insurance Services. [16946]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* I understand that it is the policy of the Serious Fraud Office not to give operational details of inquiries it may make or be asked to make pursuant to mutual legal assistance arrangements relating to alleged fraud.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many managing agents for reinsurers are located in the United Kingdom. [16942]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* A figure for the number of managing agents of reinsurance companies is not readily available.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what investigations his Department has carried out into the London managing agency CRM Insurance Services; and what conclusions were reached; [16945]

(2) what investigations his officials have carried out into the reinsurance companies, Dai Ichi Kyoto, Kobe Reinsurance and North American Fidelity; and what conclusions were reached. [16947]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answers 24 February 1997]:* My Department will always consider carefully any information brought to its attention which may be relevant to its regulatory responsibilities for insurance; but it is the Department's policy not to confirm or deny whether it has carried out an investigation into the affairs of particular companies.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) which bodies have regulatory responsibility for the London reinsurance industry and its managing agencies; and by what means they report to Parliament; [16943]

(2) what recent reviews he has conducted of the regulation of United Kingdom managing agents for offshore reinsurers. [16941]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answers 24 February 1997]:* Reinsurance companies which carry on insurance business in the United Kingdom in the terms of the Insurance Companies Act 1982 are required to be authorised and regulated by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who is directly accountable to Parliament. Managing agents are not subject to regulation separate from that applied to the reinsurance company or companies they

represent. Agents who are registered brokers are, however, subject to control by the Insurance Brokers Registration Council, which is an independent statutory body. There is no requirement on it to report to Parliament but the Secretary of State has responsibility for approving its rules and for the appointment of five of the 17 members of the Council. Members of Lloyd's and Lloyd's managing agents are regulated by the Council of Lloyd's under the Lloyd's Acts 1871 to 1982.

My Department is currently considering what, if any, further measures might be appropriate in relation to the provision of insurance in the UK by overseas reinsurers or insurers which are neither authorised under UK legislation nor entitled to provide insurance in the UK on a services basis on the basis of an authorisation issued in another European Economic Area member state.

Research Councils

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the success rates for applications for project and programme grants to each research council in each year since 1979. [17364]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* This information is not available for all councils for some of the earlier years. There has been some increase in the number of grant applications, fuelled by the increase in numbers of researchers in the system, both as a result of the change of status of the "new" universities and increasing numbers of contract researchers drawn into the "old" universities by the growth in research funding in the university system. The success rates by number of grant applications are as follows:

Success rates percentage

	AFRC[1] project	AFRC[1] programme	BBSRC[1] project	BBSRC[1] programme	SERC	EPSRC	ESRC[1]	MRC[1] project	MRC[1] programme	NERC[2]	PPARC[1]
1979							45				
1980							41				
1981							33				
1982							37				
1983					58		31				
1984					51		39				
1985					54		35				
1986	26				53		29				
1987	36				44		34				
1988	40				50		30			37	
1989	33				47		29			40	
1990	27				35		34			39	
1991	33				36		27			40	
1992	30	34			40		27			35	
1993	32	31			38		24	30	62	27	
1994			30	28	37		20	26	36	23	50
1995			24	36		44	27.5	30	59	23	60
1996				[3]34		42					

[1] Data are for financial years.
[2] NERC does not classify grants as project/programme. The figures given are for non-thematic grant applications.
[3] Provisional.

DEFENCE

Range Facilities

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 14 January, *Official Report*, columns *228–30*, if the calculations of income, operating cost and range use were prepared on the same basis for both the Eskmeals and Shoeburyness ranges; and if he will make a statement. [16955]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Dr. John Cunningham, dated 25 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your follow-up question about the income, operating cost and range use figures for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) ranges at Eskmeals and Shoeburyness, since as Chief Executive of DERA this is a matter for which I am responsible.

The figures which I gave in my letters of 14 January on these issues were prepared on the same basis.

I hope this is helpful.

Gulf War-related Illnesses

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make available to the House the findings of the further investigation into the advice given to Defence Ministers concerning organophosphate pesticide used during the Gulf war, announced by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 10 December 1996, *Official Report*, column 122. [18140]

Mr. Soames: The further investigation has now been completed. It came to the following conclusions:

(a) The answers to six PQs in 1994 concerning pesticide usage during Operation Granby were incorrect because Ministers were given flawed advice by Service and Civil Service staff, who had obtained and used inaccurate information when preparing the draft answers.

(b) The submission of flawed advice concerning pesticides to Ministers in July 1994 and again in November 1994, together with repeated submissions of the same inaccurate information at later dates, constituted a fundamental failure of the working practices adopted by Service and Civil Service staff within the area of MOD concerned.

(c) As a result of internal confusion about the subject, MOD gave incomplete information to the HCDC in a memorandum dated 9 December 1994 concerning the non-OP pesticides which had been used during Operation Granby.

(d) In the course of 1995, MOD Service and Civil Service staff received a number of indications that during the Gulf War British troops might have obtained locally and also used some OP pesticides, but this information was neither assessed nor followed up properly.

(e) No later than early June 1996, some MOD Service and Civil Service staff knew that OP pesticides had been used more extensively during Operation Granby than had previously been reported and that this new information would embarrass the Department. However, appropriate action was not taken.

(f) Although new information concerning OP pesticide usage during Operation Granby had emerged much earlier, MOD Service and Civil Service staff failed to provide Ministers with appropriate written advice on the subject until 25 September 1996. Thereafter Parliament was informed at the earliest opportunity that incorrect statements had been made.

The investigation also identified an additional occasion, in March 1995, when a ministerial private office received advice which included material relating to possible OP pesticide use in the Gulf war. A memorandum concerning the investigation is being published today and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House, together with a copy of my letter to the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee dated 20 February 1997.

Taken together, the six conclusions constitute serious failures in the formulation of advice within the MOD. I must once again apologise for the way in which flawed advice was presented to Parliament.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on seeking costs in respect of action for compensation for undiagnosed Gulf war-related illnesses taken by ex-service men and women; what plans he has to review that policy in respect of Gulf war veterans ineligible for legal aid; and if he will make a statement. [17675]

Mr. Soames: My Department's general policy is to seek to recover its costs where a case is successfully defended only where claimants are not legally aided. There are no plans to review this policy in respect of Gulf war veterans. However, if illness or injury can be shown—to the satisfaction of a court if necessary—to have resulted from MOD negligence in individual cases which are legally aided, and the same particular circumstances can be shown to apply to non-legally aided claimants, those individuals will not be forced by the MOD to enter into litigation to establish their own right to compensation.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the terms of reference of his organophosphate pesticide investigation team; and if he will make a statement on its work. [17676]

Mr. Soames: I wrote to the right hon. Member on 18 February, enclosing a copy of the terms of reference of the organophosphate pesticide investigation team. A copy of that letter was also placed in the Library of the House.

Pilots (Flying Hours)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average number of hours flown by RAF fast jet pilots in each of the last three calendar years; and how many hours are funded for 1997. [16805]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is shown. Funded hours are calculated on the basis of financial years; total funded hours per pilot for 1996–97 are therefore given.

Aircraft type	*Calendar year* 1994	1995	1996	*Funded in* 1996–97
Harrier	203.25	210.89	212.18	232
Jaguar	225.53	201.21	189.89	222
Tornado F3	214.59	211.94	190.09	222
Tornado GR	224.36	222.35	212.93	222
Hawk: 100 Squadron only	n/a	n/a	291	280

The Hawk fleet is primarily used for fast jet pilot student training at RAF Valley. Hours flown by students and instructors are dependent on the length of the training programme. The figures shown above for Hawk refer only to 100 Squadron, which provides a target towing capability; data prior to 1996 are not readily available in the form requested and could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average number of hours flown per annum by Royal Navy Sea Harrier pilots in each of the last three calendar years; and how many hours are funded for 1997. [16804]

Mr. Soames: The average annual number of hours flown per pilot by Royal Navy Sea Harrier pilots in each of the last three calendar years is as follows:

1994: 170 hours

1995: 160 hours

1996: 165 hours.

The funded level for financial year 1996–97 was 215 hours. The funded levels for 1997–98 have not yet been finalised.

Joint Service Command and Staff College

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the cost of providing a joint service command and staff college at Shrivenham. [17056]

Mr. Soames: The estimated cost of contractor-provided permanent facilities and services for the joint service command and staff college at Shrivenham, as proposed by the Defence Management Consortium, is approximately £500 million—undiscounted and VAT inclusive—for a 30-year period. This covers provision of teaching and residential accommodation for some 650 students at a time—to meet a total annual throughput of over 2,000 students—facilities management and some academic support.

Cadets

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current level of funding for the air cadets. [17427]

Mr. Soames: The level of funding for the air cadet organisation for the financial year 1996–97 is £18.735 million.

Submarine Reactor Cores

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been average annual running cost of transporting used submarine reactor cores over the past 10 years. [17635]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The average annual running cost to MOD of transporting used submarine reactor fuel, using used core transport packages prior to 1992, was approximately £200,000 per year. The average cost after that time is higher at approximately £780,000 per year. The cost increase is due both to the smaller capacity of our current fuel transport flasks, and an increase in reactor core movements.

New fuel transport flasks being constructed by British Nuclear Fuels, which are larger than the current design, will be introduced into service at the end of 1998.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress being made towards introducing the new core transport package flasks for the transport of submarine reactor cores. [17634]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer to the hon. Member to the answer I gave on the 6 June 1996, *Official Report*, columns *521–22*, to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). Satisfactory progress is being made towards introducing the new used core transport package flasks for the transport of submarine reactor cores at the end of 1998.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the location of each of the used reactor cores from his Department's nuclear-powered submarines. [17636]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Currently, 45 used submarine reactor cores are held in long-term storage at BNF plc Sellafield and three are held in temporary storage—one each at Rosyth dockyard, Devonport dockyard and the naval reactor test establishment at Dounreay.

MOD policy is to remove all used submarine reactor cores to long-term storage at BNF plc Sellafield as soon as possible after defuel. The cores currently in temporary storage will be removed at the first available opportunity.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersens, *(c)* BMI and *(d)* Capita and *(e)* Sema since 1992 and the broad function to be carried out by the contractor and the value of the contract in each case. [17611]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The table summarises the number of contracts recorded on my Department's headquarters contracts database for each of the companies and each of the years requested. Because of the way in which the information is recorded, this is shown by financial year ending 31 March, rather than calendar year. I am withholding under exemption 7 of the code of practice on access to government information details of individual contract values and, when there are only a few contracts, total values.

To list each contract individually and research even the broad function of each could be carried out only at disproportionate cost.

	Financial year				
	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*[1]1996–97*
EDS	58	66	72	47	31
Andersens	9	6	1	nil	2
BMI	nil	1	nil	nil	nil
Capita	nil	1	nil	6	nil
Sema	9	6	6	6	3

[1] To January.

The data do not include contracts placed by MOD agencies. I have asked chief executives to write to the hon. Member separately if they hold relevant information.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 26 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) to your question asking for a list of contracts awarded to EDS, Andersons, BMI, Capita and Sema since 1992 together with the function of the contractor and value of contract in each case.

I am afraid that it is not our practice to give details of individual contracts, either by function or value, as this information is commercially confidential but I list below the numbers of contracts placed by DERA with Anderson, Capita, EDS and Sema since 1992 and the approximate total value of the contracts for each company. DERA has placed no contracts with BMI since 1992.

Company	*Number of contracts*	*Total value £ million*
Anderson	2	0.2
Capita	6	0.2
EDS	412	39.0
Sema	126	8.0

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 26 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about contracts awarded to EDS, Andersens, BMI, Capita and Sema since 1992, as this falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office.

Of the companies you list the Meterological Office has, since 1992, awarded:-

(a) a software development contract to EDS Defence Ltd valued at £27K, VAT exclusive

(b) a contract for consultancy support for the introduction of a new Management Information System placed with Capita Recruitment, with a value of £72K, VAT exclusive.

I hope this answers your question.

Letter from Michael R. Pack to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 26 February 1997:

1. You recently asked the Secretary of State for Defence a Parliamentary Question about contracts awarded by the Ministry of Defence to a number of commercial companies.

2. For the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office Defence Agency, the issues raised fall within the responsibilities delegated to the Chief Executive, Rear Admiral J P Clarke. In the normal course of events, Admiral Clarke would have replied to you personally but he is at present absent from the Office on official duty so I am replying on his behalf.

3. Before 31 March 1996, contracts were not let by the Hydrographic Office but by the appropriate contract branch within the Ministry of Defence. Since becoming a Trading fund on 1 April, however, we have let one small contract with EDS to provide training in a software package for the management of geographic data; and a more substantial contract to provide post design services for the documeni management and geographic management systems themselves. The former is complete; the latter ongoing.

5. As regards the value of the contracts I am sure you appreciate that such information is commercially sensitive.

Ion Exchange Resin

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many modified magnox flasks and resin catch tanks are being used at Rosyth and Devonport to store ion exchange resin. [17633]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Ships Support Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. V. Babington to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 26 February 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the numbers of modified magnox flasks and resin catch tanks presently being used at Rosyth and Devonport to store ion exchange resin, as this is related to my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Ships Support Agency.

The details you have requested are:

Rosyth Royal Dockyard: Thirty nine resin catch tanks are presently being used;

Devonport Royal Dockyard: Twenty eight resin catch tanks and eleven modified magnox flasks are presently being used.

Territorial Army Centre, Cardiff

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent on the recent refurbishment of the Territorial Army centre in central Cardiff; and what compensation arrangement has been negotiated as a result of the changes required by the proposals for the new national stadium. [17411]

Mr. Soames: The total cost of the rebuild of the Territorial Army centre at Park street, Cardiff, which was completed in July 1994, was £2.041 million. In return for our vacating this site to allow for the redevelopment of the national stadium, the Welsh Rugby Union will make provision for facilities for the Army cadet force detachment within the new stadium complex and construct a new TA centre elsewhere within Cardiff. This will be larger than the current site and will, therefore, be capable of housing an additional unit. Its construction will be at no cost to the Ministry of Defence. The Welsh Rugby Union has also indicated that it will provide an advertising hoarding within the national stadium for reserve force recruiting for a period of 10 years.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Grant-maintained Schools

17. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the performance of grant-maintained schools. [16069]

Mr. Forth: The performance of pupils attending grant-maintained schools has improved year on year.

Jobseeker's Allowance

18. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many applicants for the jobseeker's allowance have been denied benefit since the inception of the allowance. [16071]

Mr. Forth: An estimated 96,000 claims for jobseeker's allowance have been refused since 7 October 1996.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people currently in receipt of jobseeker's allowance have placed restrictions on their availability for work by virtue of *(a)* physical and mental limitations and *(b)* caring responsibilities. [17601]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Robert Horne to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 26 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to reply to your question about the number of people who are currently claiming Jobseeker's Allowance and who have placed restriction on their availability for work by virtue of physical or mental condition or caring responsibilities.

Unfortunately, we do not hold information on the number of people, with either a physical or mental condition or who have caring responsibilities, who have agreed with an employment adviser a pattern of availability which included restrictions. The only information held is on the number of claims referred to the adjudication authorities where there is a doubt on availability because of a restriction and the number of decisions made.

This information, together with statistics on the other adjudication officer decisions and disallowance rates, is contained in a published document entitled "Analysis of Adjudication Officer Decisions". This provides information on all the main entitlement questions arising on claims. The latest information related to the quarter ending 30 September 1996. The first information relating to Jobseeker's Allowance will be in the publication for the quarter ending 31 December 1996. This is expected to be published by the end of March 1997 and copies will be placed in the Library.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what benefit sanction will be imposed on a jobseeker's allowance claimant who is given a jobseeker's direction to apply for a specific part-time vacancy of less than 24 hours per week if *(a)* he refuses to apply for the vacancy in question, *(b)* he agrees

to apply but is not offered the job and *(c)* he is offered the job which he then refuses; and if she will make a statement. [17624]

Mr. Forth: A fixed-length sanction of loss of benefit for two weeks—or four weeks if a separate fixed-length sanction has already been imposed within the previous 12 months—will be imposed if, without good cause, a JSA claimant refuses or fails to carry out a reasonable jobseeker's direction to apply for a particular job of less than 24 hours per week. No sanction will be imposed if the jobseeker carries out the direction but is not offered the job, nor if he is offered the job and then refuses it.

Guidance is issued to Employment Service jobcentres that staff should be particularly careful before giving a jobseeker's direction in respect of a job of less than 24 hours a week. Jobseekers should be directed to apply for such jobs only if this would improve their prospects of finding further work, or the job is sufficiently well paid to enable them to leave JSA altogether.

Schools Funding (East Sussex)

19. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on schools funding in East Sussex in 1997–98. [16072]

Mr. Robin Squire: East Susssex's 1997–98 education standard spending assessment is £151.4 million—an above average increase of some £7 million, or 4.8 per cent. It is up to the authority to ensure that the increase in spending power that we are providing reaches its schools.

Class Sizes

20. **Mr. Brian David Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the change in the number of children in primary classes of over 30 since 1992; and what is the current figure as a percentage of all children in primary classes. [16073]

Mr. Robin Squire: From 1992 to 1996, the number of children in single-teacher primary classes of over 30 rose by 358,000. In 1996, 31.8 per cent. of primary children were in such classes, compared with 35.3 per cent. in 1979.

Grammar Schools

21. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make it her policy to increase the number of grammar schools. [16074]

Mr. Forth: The Government's policy is to encourage more grammar schools wherever parents want them, because that will promote choice, diversity and higher standards.

28. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received regarding the future of grammar schools. [16082]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend receives a range of views on this as on other matters. The Government welcome the high standards which many grammar schools achieve. They are committed to retaining the existing grammar schools, and supporting the development of new ones, as an important element in promoting diversity and choice for parents.

School Repairs

22. **Mr. Pearson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to tackle the repairs backlog in schools. [16075]

Mrs. Gillan: It is for local education authorities and school governors to assess the need for maintenance work in respect of school premises which they own and maintain.

Employment Policy

23. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the implications for employment policy of the changing balance between part-time and full-time work. [16076]

Mr. Forth: Both full and part-time jobs are increasing. We shall continue with the policies under which 900,000 more jobs have been created and unemployment has fallen by over 1 million since 1992.

Dyslexia

24. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what provisions she has made for the proper teaching of children with dyslexia. [16077]

Mrs. Gillan: The special educational needs code of practice offers guidance on the assessment of a dyslexic child. The Department supports training for teachers of dyslexic pupils through the grant for education support and training programme and is consulting over the national curriculum for initial teacher training, which has a particular focus on literacy.

School Transport

25. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received from education authorities on the provision of school transport under the recent standard spending assessment settlements; and if she will make a statement. [16078]

Mrs. Gillan: None.

Capital Borrowing Allocation (Birmingham)

26. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the capital borrowing allocation to Birmingham *(a)* for 1997–98 and *(b)* 1996–97. [16079]

Mrs. Gillan: Birmingham's annual capital guideline for education for 1997–98 is £1.06 million, and for 1996–97 is £5.38 million.

In addition, the authority has received a supplementary credit approval of £0.1 million for 1997–98, and £1.28 million for 1996–97.

School Discipline

27. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to ensure that high standards of discipline are upheld in schools. [16081]

Mr. Forth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson).

School Performance (Harrow)

29. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the performance of maintained schools in the Harrow East division of the London borough of Harrow in respect of the league table system and exam and assessment measurements. [16083]

Mrs. Gillan: The 1996 secondary school performance tables show that 53 per cent. of pupils attending the six maintained secondary schools in East Harrow obtained five or more A*–C GCSE grades, against an England average of 44.5 per cent. National curriculum assessment results are not published centrally for individual schools, although key stage 2 results will be published shortly in the primary school performance tables.

Premature Retirement (Education)

30. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards premature retirement in educational institutions. [16085]

Mrs. Gillan: The Government's policy is that education employers should be accountable for the cost of their decisions on premature retirement. The Government intend premature retirement to continue to be available as a management tool, and have made funds available for that purpose.

Grammar School Leavers (Unemployment)

31. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the number of people who have left grammar schools in the last three years who are registered as unemployed. [16087]

Mr. Paice: The Department does not collect the information requested.

Assisted Places Scheme

32. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the assisted places scheme in enabling poorer parents to provide their children with a private education; and if she will make a statement. [16088]

Mrs. Gillan: The assisted places scheme gives able children from low-income families the opportunity of an independent education that they would not otherwise have had.

Jobseeker's Allowance

33. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the impact of the jobseeker's allowance on rural areas; and if she will make a statement. [16089]

Mr. Forth: We have commissioned a full evaluation of JSA policy from the centre for research in social policy at Loughborough university. The Employment Service itself will be carrying out local monitoring of delivery.

Lone Mothers

34. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to extend job opportunities for lone mothers. [16090]

Mrs. Gillan: A flexible labour market without unnecessary regulations creates job opportunities for all groups, and the United Kingdom has more of its people in work than any other major EU country.

Unemployment

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the level of unemployment as measured by the claimant count. [16068]

Mr. Forth: Claimant unemployment has fallen by over 1.1 million since December 1992.

Permanent Jobs

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to encourage the creation of more permanent jobs. [16091]

Mr. Forth: This Government will continue with the policies of reducing burdens on business and creating the framework for economic growth, which have resulted in the creation of nearly 900,000 jobs and a reduction in unemployment of over 1 million since the recovery began in December 1992.

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many questions were tabled for reply by her Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16806]

Mr. Robin Squire: A list of the number of written and oral parliamentary questions answered by the Department in the Sessions 1982–83 to 1995–96, as supplied by the parliamentary on-line information system unit, has been placed in the Library. Figures for 1979–80 to 1981–92 are not available.

The rest of the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Education (Humberside)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment the Office for Standards in Education has made of the quality of education delivered by the former Humberside county council, relative to the national average. [17045]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is primarily a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools. However, I understand that the former Humberside county council was not among the authorities which have been reviewed by Ofsted, and it has not therefore made any assessment of this kind.

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from her Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17061]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following information details the number of items stolen or otherwise unaccounted for during the 12-month period from 1 February 1996 to 31 January 1997:

	Items of miscellaneous equipment/furniture not accounted for	*Items of IT equipment stolen*	*Items of IT equipment not accounted for*	*Total value £*	*Items valued: £5,000 or over*
DfEE HQ	2	6	1	8,845	nil
Employment service	0	269	0	484,000	4 network fileservers

Computer Software Courses

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will conduct a survey of employers' attitudes to the quality of computer software courses available at different educational institutions. [17645]

Mr. Robin Squire: No. This is the responsibility of the institutions and examining bodies concerned.

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what information she has collated on the number of children excluded from *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools (i) in the United Kingdom and (ii) in other OECD countries; and if she will make a statement. [17662]

Mr. Forth: The latest figures on exclusion from schools in England relate to the school year 1994–95. These show that 1,365 pupils permanently excluded from primary schools, and 9,197 from secondary schools; a further 522 were excluded from special schools.

Data on exclusions from schools in other parts of the United Kingdom are a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Information on exclusions in other OECD countries is not available.

Teachers (Staffordshire)

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers were employed by Staffordshire county council in each of the past 15 years. [17509]

Mr. Forth: The number of teachers employed by Staffordshire LEA are shown in the following table. Staff in grant-maintained schools are excluded.

Full-time equivalent (fte) numbers of teachers in the LEA maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special education sector

January	*Fte*
1982	10,380
1983	10,170
1984	10,070
1985	9,800
1986	9,480
1987	9,130
1988	9,120
1989	9,030
1990	9,100
1991	9,290
1992	9,250
1993	8,740
1994	8,430
1995	8,400
1996	8,500

Early Retirement (Teachers)

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers in East Sussex retired before the age of 60 years other than for reasons of health or disability in each of the past six years. [17598]

Mrs. Gillan: Teachers from the maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special sector in East Sussex, who took premature retirement on grounds other than ill-health or disability from 1990–91 to 1995–96, are shown in the following table.

Financial year	*[1]Number of premature retirements*
1990–91	61
1991–92	41
1992–93	47
1993=94	67
1994–95	46
1995–96[2]	58

[1] Excludes those last recorded in sixth form colleges.

[2] Provisional.

Jobmatch Scheme

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of *(a)* the costs and *(b)* the numbers gaining if the national jobmatch scheme for under 25-year-olds was available on the same basis to (1) unemployed people of any age who have been unemployed for (i) at least six months, (ii) at least one year and (iii) at least two years and (2) unemployed people over the age of 50 years who have been unemployed for *(A)* at least six months, *(B)* at least one year and *(C)* at least two years. [17600]

Mr. Forth: The jobmatch programme is an intensive measure designed to help very long-term unemployed people to leave unemployment for a part-time job. We have developed a range of measures designed to meet the diverse needs of unemployed people, with the most intensive such as jobmatch targeted on those who need the most help to get back to work. It would not be a cost-effective use of the taxpayer's resources to make jobmatch available to shorter-term unemployed people.

From April, jobmatch will be available to those young people aged 18 to 24 who have been unemployed for two years or more. We estimate that the costs of making jobmatch available, on the same basis, to all people unemployed for two years or more would be some £47 million in 1997–98; and the costs of making it available to those aged over 50 who have been unemployed for two years or more would be some £11 million in 1997–98.

It is not possible accurately to estimate the programme costs of a national jobmatch scheme for groups of people who have been unemployed for less than two years. That is because jobmatch has been piloted only among very long-term unemployed people, and it cannot be assumed that take-up of the scheme among shorter-term unemployed people would be the same.

Hearing-impaired Children (London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools in each London borough provide specific teaching for children with hearing difficulties; and if she will make a statement. [17589]

Mrs. Gillan: There are five special schools maintained by local education authorities in London which cater specifically for children with hearing impairments—one school in each of Camden, Haringey, Lambeth, Waltham Forest and Wandsworth. The majority of hearing-impaired children are educated in mainstream schools, with specialist support. Records of this provision are not maintained centrally.

LEAs have a duty to place children with special educational needs in mainstream schools where this is compatible with the wishes of parents, the needs of the child, the needs of other children at the school, and with the efficient use of resources. The Government also recognise a continuing need for special school provision where that is necessary and where parents want it.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many new nursery voucher places for four-year-olds have been created in each of the four pilot local education authority areas; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [16139]

Mr. Robin Squire: The nursery education voucher scheme has already stimulated an encouraging expansion of places in the phase 1 areas, as described in paragraphs 8.21 to 8.25 of the Department's report on phase 1, copies of which have been placed in the Library. I expect that expansion to continue in phase 2.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what advice she plans to issue to pre-school providers on the admission of four-year-olds who do not have a nursery education voucher from April 1997. [16056]

Mr. Squire: The Department has sent advice to all providers who will participate in the nursery education voucher scheme from April, and additional guidance to LEAs and maintained primary schools.

Foreign Language Teaching

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to encourage the teaching of foreign languages in primary schools; and if she will make a statement. [16080]

Mrs. Gillan: We have promised no further change to the national curriculum until 2000. Primary schools which have the necessary staffing and other resources are free to teach foreign languages now, and many do. For the present, our priority is to ensure that all secondary schools pupils learn a modern language to a worthwhile level of competence. This is where available resources must be directed for the time being.

Your second and third questions (359 and 363, tabled on 20 February) asked, what have been the excess mortality rates in Northern Ireland for each of the last 10 years expressed (a) in excess numbers and (b) as percentages, and, what have been the excess winter mortality rates in Northern Ireland for each of the past 10 years in terms of (a) excess numbers and (b) percentages for (i) people over the age of 65 years, (ii) single parent families, (iii) people in receipt of income support, (iv) people with disabilities and (v) all other people not included in the above.

The mortality rates requested are shown in Tables 2, 3 and 4 below. For the purpose of this exercise winter has been taken to mean the four month period extending form December to March.

HEALTH

Oral Contraceptives (Safety)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the report on the role played by the Committee on Safety of Medicines in his announcements on the safety of third generation combined oral contraceptives in October 1995. [17141]

Mr. Malone: The announcement to which the hon. Member refers was made by the Committee on Safety of Medicines. The role of the CSM is as an expert advisory committee to the licensing authority, as embodied in the Medicines Act 1968 There is no report on its role in the announcement. The advice given by the CSM in October 1995 still stands and is published in the British National Formulary.

Lariam

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *284* what proposals have been made by the Medicines Control Agency to end the delay in reporting full details of the degree of severity of side effects of the drug Lariam; [17208]

(2) if he will list the terms of reference and membership of the Malaria Advisory Committee; what reports have been made to the Medicines Control Agency and his Department since 1990 by this committee *(a)* involving and *(b)* not involving the use of the drug Lariam; and when the latest malaria guidelines were published by this committee. [17206]

Mr. Malone: The guidelines of the use of malaria prophylaxis are prepared by an informal group of experts who have no formal terms of reference or fixed membership. The group does not report to the Medicines Control Agency The guidelines are aimed at health professionals and have been published in the *British Medical Journal*—most recently, 1993; 306:1247–1252 and 1995; 310: 709–7144—where they are available to all those with an interest. These reports include advice on the use of mefloquine, Lariam, and give the names of those who have collaborated in drawing up the guidelines. Copies of the journal are in the Library.

Residential Care (Coventry)

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, columns *161–62*, if he will ascertain the occupancy rates of local authority homes, voluntary sector residential homes and private sector residential homes in Coventry; and if he will henceforth publish data on occupancy separately for private and voluntary sector nursing homes. [17055]

Mr. Burns: The latest information with which to calculate occupancy rates of residential homes was published in "Residential Accommodation Statistics 1996"—Statistical Bulletin 1996/25—and is summarised in the table. Data collected centrally do not separately identify private and voluntary sector nursing homes.

Registered beds, occupied beds and occupancy rates in residential and nursing homes in Coventry, at 31 March 1996

Numbers and percentages

	Residential homes			*Nursing homes*
	Local authority homes	*Voluntary sector*	*Private sector*	
Registered beds	490	160	1,280	570
Occupied beds	450	150	1,160	480
Occupancy rate	92 per cent.	91 per cent.	91 per cent.	84 per cent.

Note:
The number of registered and occupied beds are shown here rounded to the nearest 10. Occupancy rates are calculated on the unrounded figures.
Source:
Department of Health annual statistical returns RAC5, KO36.

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17064]

Mr. Horam: For the purposes of the table, items of equipment and furniture stolen and otherwise unaccounted for are combined because it is not possible in all cases to distinguish one from the other. There are no items valued at £5,000 or more. The Department constantly reviews its security measures in the light of losses.

Calendar year	*IT items (number)*	*IT items (estimated cost)*	*Other items (number)*	*Other items (estimated cost)*
1996	131	£35,410	10	£1,065

Vacant Consultant Posts

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant posts were vacant in the Northern and Yorkshire regions in each specialty according to the medical and dental work force census in September 1994, 1995 and 1996. [17486]

Mr. Malone: Information on hospital medical and dental consultant vacant posts by region and by speciality for 1994 and 1995 is available in "Hospital Medical Staff—England and Wales: Consultant, Staff Grade, Senior Registrars and Senior House officers—Regional Whole Time Equivalent and Vacant Posts, Table R5", copies of which are available in the Library. Data for 1996 will be available later this year.

NHS Audits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS audit activity was devoted to probity audits in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1996. [17685]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally. The examination of probity forms one part of the work carried out by internal and external auditors, and cannot readily be quantified.

NHS Waiting Lists (Patients off Sick)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of days patients are off sick while waiting for treatment on the NHS in each of the last five years. [17863]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

NHS Hospitals

Sir George Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospitals there were in the

United Kingdom in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and how many cottage hospitals there were in each of those years. [17532]

Mr. Horam: The information is not collected centrally.

Blood Pressure Control Products

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the expenditure per head of population in each health district on blood pressure control products prescribed by GPs and recorded in the prescribing analyses and costs systems for the last three years for which information is available. [17537]

Mr. Malone: The available information has been placed in the Library.

Strokes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the incidence of *(a)* stroke and *(b)* death from stroke in each health district in England in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [17597]

Mr. Horam: Information on deaths from stroke—cerebrovascular disease—in 1993, 1994 and 1995 for each health authority in England is published by the Department of Health in the "Public Health Common Data set 1996" copies of which have been placed in the Library. Data on the precise incidence of stroke are not collected centrally.

TRANSPORT

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16791]

Mr. Bowis: A list of the number of written and oral parliamentary questions answered by my Department in the Sessions 1982–83 to 1995–96, as supplied by the parliamentary on-line information service unit, has been placed in the Library. Figures for 1979–80 to 1981–82 are not available.

The remainder of the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Greenwich Exhibition Site

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the additional costs of constructing the station at the Greenwich exhibition site so that it can cater for visitors to the exhibition. [17646]

Mr. Bowis: The additional road traffic arising from the development of the millennium exhibition site requires the access road to the station to be constructed to dual carriageway standard, at an additional cost of £700,000. This cost will be met from developer contributions. No design changes to the station itself are expected, based on current forecasts for demand arising from the exhibition.

Coaches and Minibuses (Seat Belts)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review his policy in respect of children's travel on school trips on coaches built prior to 1988; and if he will make a statement. [17687]

Mr. Bowis: From 10 February next year, coaches first used before 1 October 1988 will have to be provided with seat belts if they take children on organised trips. These older coaches have been allowed an extra year to have belts fitted for children because it was recognised that some of them would require extensive strengthening work in order to meet the new requirements. Minibuses and coaches already have one of the best safety records of any form of road transport and the new seat belt regulations will improve this even further. I have no plans to review the policy.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce an inspection system to ensure that seat belts used in coaches and minibuses comply with EEC directive EEC/76/115. [17688]

Mr. Bowis: No. Not all seat belts in coaches and minibuses have to comply with the seat belt anchorage directive EEC/76/115.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the inspection regime in respect of recent seat belt legislation applicable to coaches and minibuses. [17689]

Mr. Bowis: We take the issue of the adequacy of seat belt installations very seriously and have issued technical advice on what we consider to be "best practice" for seat belt installers. We have also stressed the importance of good installation in advice we have issued for users and operators.

I have decided that these belts should be examined as a part of the annual MOT test and we shall be consulting on the details of this. I have also decided that the Vehicle Inspectorate will include the condition of minibus and coach seat belts in the other enforcement checks they carry out during the year.

Ms Walley: To ask the secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce a requirement for new minibuses and van conversions to be fitted with seat belt anchorage systems which have passed Vehicle Certification Agency witnessed teats to M2 level. [17690]

Mr. Bowis: Manufacturers of line built vehicles already have seat belt anchorages approved using a destructive test on an example of their vehicle. Such an approval requirement would be inappropriate for low-volume or specialist conversions.

Road Network (Dual Carriageways)

Mr. Garrett: To ask the secretary of State for Transport how may towns and cities in England with a population of between 75,000 and 100,000 are connected by dual carriageway to the national motorway network; and if he will list them. [17310]

Mr. Watts: There are 30 towns and cities with a population of between 75,000 and 100,000 that are connected via a dual carriageway to the national motorway network. They are:

Ashford
Barnsley
Birkenhead
Burnley
Cheltenham
Chester
Chesterfield
Crawley
Dartford
Darlington
Gateshead
Gillingham
Gloucester
Gravesham
Grimsby
Hove
Lewes
Redditch
Rochdale
Salford
Scunthorpe
Stevenage
Stockton
Taunton
Wakefield
Watford
Welwyn Hatfield
Wigan
Worcester
Worthing

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the roads in England which have been designated part of the trans-European networks which are not currently dualled; and what percentage these non-dualled roads are of the total mileage of the trans-European networks within England. [17311]

Mr. Watts: The trans-European road network within the United Kingdom is 4,111 miles long. Of that length, 1,220 miles—29.7 per cent.—are single carriageway. Figures for the constituent parts of the United Kingdom are not readily available.

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many towns and cities in England with a larger population than that of Norwich are not connected by dual carriageway to the national motorway network; and if he will list them. [17312]

Mr. Watts: There are two towns with a population larger than that of Norwich which are not connected by dual carriageway to the national motorway network. They are Huddersfield and Poole. The trunk road programme includes schemes to complete the dualling of the A11 to Norwich.

North London Railway Line

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the total planned investment in track renewal, bridge repairs and station refurbishment on the Barking to Gospel Oak branch of the North London line; [15997]

(2) what reports he has received on the condition of bridges on the Barking to Gospel Oak branch of the North London line; and if he will make a statement. [15998]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* These are operational matters for Railtrack. However, Railtrack has confirmed that the bridge over the River Lea at South Tottenham was closed for safety-related repair work during the period 7 to 10 February. Further information can be obtained from Railtrack.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Correspondence

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire will receive a reply to his letter written in response to the Minister's letter, reference C95/23361/13551. [16917]

Mr. Sproat: A reply will be sent to the hon. Member shortly.

National Lottery Grants

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list for each county in England and Wales and each region of Scotland, the total amount of national lottery grants awarded, expressed as an amount per head of population. [15245]

Mr. Sproat: To date, 12,657 awards totalling more than £1.9 billion have been announced for projects in England, Wales and Scotland. The list for amount per head of population is as follows:

Amount per head of population

Population	*County*	*Total amount £*	*£ per head*
England			
968,094	Avon	108,061,143	111.62
543,483	Bedfordshire	6,710,452	12.35
770,308	Berkshire	12,131,727	15.75
669,212	Buckinghamshire	26,888,719	40.18
698,368	Cambridgeshire	47,800,351	68.45
982,342	Cheshire	10,108,422	10.29
556,220	Cleveland	19,673,233	35.37
487,612	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	13,263,066	27.20
493,459	Cumbria	20,697,508	41.94
953,301	Derbyshire	9,722,129	10.20
1,059,887	Devon	23,706,467	22.37
676,739	Dorset	14,558,982	21.51
603,539	Durham	9,792,761	16.23
727,615	East Sussex	13,241,143	18.20
1,573,758	Essex	12,024,318	7.64
547,335	Gloucestershire	20,145,207	36.81
2,578,000	Great Manchester	144,138,497	55.91
1,603,935	Hampshire	92,482,563	57.66
699,072	Hereford and Worcester	26,315,782	37.64
999,759	Hertfordshire	19,418,043	19.42
885,693	Humberside	12,106,463	13.67

Amount per head of population

Population	*County*	*Total amount £*	*£ per head*
126,881	Isle of Wight	5,181,576	40.84
1,559,630	Kent	16,009,050	10.26
1,424,924	Lancashire	39,407,384	27.66
914,376	Leicestershire	12,846,303	14.05
608,598	Lincolnshire	9,818,129	16.13
6,933,000	London	712,559,631	102.78
1,441,000	Merseyside	31,372,831	21.77
773,747	Norfolk	12,430,983	16.07
741,501	North Yorkshire	21,938,940	29.59
606,123	Northamptonshire	8,883,261	14.33
310,232	Northumberland	4,524,150	14.58
1,031,671	Nottinghamshire	28,832,643	27.95
592,260	Oxfordshire	11,017,405	18.60
419,955	Shropshire	10,190,117	24.26
480,251	Somerset	8,322,893	17.33
1,306,000	South Yorkshire	88,429,729	67.71
1,064,481	Staffordshire	28,609,281	26.88
670,843	Suffolk	12,323,008	18.37
1,034,568	Surrey	17,116,585	16.54
1,138,000	Tyne and Wear	64,345,205	56.54
2,102,000	West Yorkshire	49,971,022	23.77
494,168	Warwickshire	5,972,310	12.09
2,634,000	West Midlands	155,465,585	59.02
729,540	West Sussex	4,817,727	6.60
596,166	Wiltshire	31,728,011	53.22
Scotland			
105,300	Borders	3,668,909	34.84
272,900	Central	5,946,806	21.79
147,900	Dumfries and Galloway	4,390,051	29.68
351,200	Fife Region	8,678,082	24.71
528,100	Grampian	20,592,282	38.99
206,900	Highland	43,961,585	212.48
753,900	Lothian	91,709,918	121.65
19,760	Orkney Isles	4,863,270	246.12
22,830	Shetland Isles	397,018	17.39
2,286,800	Strathclyde	103,302,676	45.17
395,200	Tayside	15,557,328	39.37
29,410	Western Isles	1,827,102	62.13
Wales			
415,900	Clwyd	19,514,221	46.92
351,500	Dyfed	45,414,923	129.20
450,300	Gwent	5,815,737	12.92
240,200	Gwynedd	14,386,880	59.90
544,300	Mid Glamorgan	11,057,187	20.31
119,900	Powys	7,189,213	59.96
413,200	South Glamorgan	56,868,014	137.63
371,200	West Glamorgan	6,680,958	18.00

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the contracts awarded by her Department to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersens, *(c)* BMI, *(d)* Capita and *(e)* Sema since 1992, and the broad function to be carried out by the contractor and the value of the contract in each case. [17612]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage has awarded one contract to Sema Group from 1993, for outsourced IT service provision, valued at about £1 million per annum, and one non-IT consultancy contract to Capita in 1994 worth about £30,000. The Department has not awarded any contracts to the other companies mentioned.

University and College Sport

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many universities and colleges have applied for lottery funding in order to improve their provision for sport. [17406]

Mr. Sproat: To date, 96 applications have been made for a total of £162 million. These figures include successful, unsuccessful, withdrawn and lapsed applications, and those currently under consideration.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many universities and colleges have successfully applied for lottery funding in order to improve their provision for sport. [17407]

Mr. Sproat: To date, the national lottery distributing bodies have announced 43 awards for the provision of sport in universities and colleges, for a total of £26.2 million.

British Academy of Sport

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the current position of the planning of the British Academy of Sport. [17413]

Mr. Sproat: We announced on 25 February that the preferred site for the British Academy of Sport will be chosen from three contenders: the Central Consortium, the Heyford Consortium and the Sheffield Consortium. These proposals will now be considered in more detail by the United Kingdom Sports Council and my Department.

WALES

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the minimum age requirements enforced by his Department. [15926]

Mr. Hague: There is no specific legislation for minimum age requirements which applies only to Wales.

"Government Expenditure and Revenue, Wales, 1994–95"

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide a breakdown of the £3.5 billion described as "All Other Revenues" raised by the Government in Wales in section 6 of the Welsh Office publication "Government Expenditure and Revenue, Wales, 1994–95", allocating the revenues to the headings set out in appendix B of that document. [16270]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Estimated general Government receipts, Wales, 1994–95
"Other revenues" by source

	£ million
Corporation tax	924
Capital gains tax	39
Inheritance tax	50
Stamp duties	65
Petrol, derv, etc.	562

Estimated general Government receipts, Wales, 1994–95
"Other revenues" by source

	£ million
Cigarettes and tobacco	388
Alcoholic drink	238
Betting and gaming	62
Customs duties	84
Agricultural levies	7
Air passenger duty	4
Motor vehicle excise duty	174
Other taxes and royalties	244
Interest and dividend receipts	213
Gross trading surpluses and rent	223
Imputed charge for capital consumption	176
Other receipts (including insurance premium tax)	52
Total	3,505

Powered Wheelchairs

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make available powered wheelchairs to all those disabled in Wales who request them. [16620]

Mr. Hague: An additional £500,000 will be available each year from 1 April 1997 to provide indoor-outdoor powered wheelchairs. Up to 300 will be provided in 1997–98. The artificial limb and appliance service will be consulting relevant bodies about the criteria for their issue.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will inform family doctors in Wales that they should draw to the attention of their patients' possible entitlement to disability living allowance; and if he will make a statement. [16624]

Mr. Hague: Family doctors are independent contractors—responsible for providing general medical services only. However, family doctors have access to a wide range of information about possible entitlement to social security benefits through leaflets, which are available in both English and Welsh, and may if they wish bring these to the attention of patients.

Community Hospitals

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many community hospitals there were in the NHS in Wales in April 1992; what is the current number; and what will be the numbers, on the basis of current plans, in April 1998. [16626]

Mr. Hague: There were 93 NHS community hospitals—excluding major acute, psychiatric and specialist hospitals—in the NHS in Wales in April 1992, the number at present is 88. It is not possible to speculate on the number of community facilities that will exist in 1998.

Inward Investment (South-west Wales)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what incentives he proposes for companies to locate new projects in *(a)* the south-west of Wales and *(b)* the western part of the coalfield valleys; and if he will make a statement. [16625]

Mr. Hague: Significant incentives are already available to companies wishing to locate in these areas through regional selective assistance, the Welsh Development Agency's various programmes and its promotion of the area for inward investment.

I want to see the benefits of our success in attracting inward investment spread more widely and have therefore announced that I shall be setting new and more demanding targets for the agency with the aim of securing a greater proportion of jobs and investment in those areas of Wales which are outside the eastern M4 and A55 corridors. I have also said that I will be asking the agency, within European Commission and other limits, to recognise the extra cost of locating in those areas.

Ysbyty Glan Clwyd Cancer Facility

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the cost to public funds of the cancer facility for Ysbyty Glan Clwyd; and what additional finance will be made available by the Welsh Office to the North Wales health authority to meet these costs. [16616]

Mr. Hague: The capital cost of the centre is estimated at £20 million and will be met by the Welsh Office.

North Wales health authority estimates that, over the first 17 years of operation, the revenue cost of the cancer centre at Ysbyty Glan Clwyd will be £92.3 million, at 1996–97 prices. The Welsh Office will contribute an additional £36.9 million through revenue support and capital charge funding.

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16787]

Mr. Hague: A list of the number of written and oral parliamentary questions answered by my Department in the Sessions 1982–83 to 1995–96, as supplied by the POLIS unit, has been placed in the House Library. Figures for 1979–80 to 1981–82 are not available.

The rest of the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency set up by his Department since the start of April 1992. [16969]

Mr. Hague: No executive agencies for which the Welsh Office has sole or lead responsibility have been set up from that date.

Bryn Y Neuadd Hospital (Advocacy Schemes)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will re-establish direct Welsh Office funding for

advocacy schemes at Bryn Y Neuadd long-stay hospital for those with learning difficulties; and if he will make a statement on the future of the schemes. [16958]

Mr. Hague: Local authorities have for some time had flexibility in determining which local projects should receive funding under the Welsh mental handicap strategy. In 1997–98 we are beginning the process of transferring financial accountability for these funds to authorities. This underlines our view that decisions as to which projects for people with a learning disability should be supported from the funds available are best taken at the local level. This is not a principle with which I would now wish to interfere.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest planned expenditure for Health in Wales for 1997–98; and how this figure differs in real terms from that planned for 1997–98 when the figure was first included in the Welsh Office forward financial programme. [17187]

Mr. Hague: Planned expenditure for 1997–98 for health and personal social services was first included in the Welsh Office departmental report 1995–96 to 1997–98 (Cm 2815). This was £2,321 million at 1995–96 prices and including forecast gross domestic product inflation as at November 1994. The 1997–98 provision for health and personal social services is £2.368 million at 1997–98 prices, including forecast GDP inflation as at December 1996. On a common price basis, 1997–98 provision represents a real-terms increase of £53 million over the earlier plans figure.

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17069]

Mr. Hague: For the Welsh Office and its agency the information is:

	Non IT		*IT material*	
	Number	*Value*	*Number*	*Value*
(a) Items of equipment and furniture stolen:				
1996–97	3	£8,778.03	nil	—
(b) Items of equipment and furniture unaccounted for:				
1996–97	3	£138.11	nil	—

There were no individual items valued at £5,000 or more.

River Dee Estuary

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the environmental protection measures he has taken in respect of the River Dee estuary. [17533]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The River Dee estuary has been classified as a special protection area under the EC wild birds directive in recognition of its internationally important populations of wintering and passage wildfowl, and designated as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar convention.

Power Station Vapour Plumes (Deeside)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact on Deeside of power station vapour plumes; and if he will make a statement. [17507]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None. The regulation of emissions from power stations is the responsibility of the Environment Agency.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cash Limits

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes are proposed to the cash limit for class III vote 2, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for 1996–97. [18138]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The cash limit for class III vote 2 for 1996–97 will be reduced by £20,000,000 from £912,586,000 to £892,586,000 to offset increased non-cash limit expenditure for class III vote 1—the Intervention Board executive agency. This reduction comes from a mixture of savings on BSE-related schemes in the current financial year.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Policy Initiatives

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to which policy initiative he has devoted most funding in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement on progress with each initiative. [15243]

Mr. Burt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's priorities are: to ensure that the overall cost of delivering the social security programme does not outstrip the nation's ability to pay; to bear down on fraud and abuse; to focus benefits on those who need them most; to improve incentives to work and save; and to encourage personal responsibility.

In order to meet these priorities, the following key initiatives have been launched over the last five years.

The Child Support Agency was launched in April 1993 to ensure both parents take financial responsibility for their children whenever they can afford to do so and is now securing consistently higher levels of maintenance for many thousands of lone parents.

Incapacity benefit was introduced in April 1995 to simplify the structure of provision for the sick and disabled and improve the targeting of resources on the long-term sick. The reforms are expected to reduce benefit expenditure by over £2 billion in the long term.

In July 1995, my right hon. Friend launched the security strategy to combat benefit fraud, putting new emphasis on prevention and deterrence whilst continuing to strengthen detection measures. The strategy has

produced year on year record savings and, under the "spend to save" initiative in the Budget, we expect to save a total of £7 billion over the next three years.

The Pensions Act 1995 introduced major reforms to both state and private pensions. The equalisation of state pension age at 65 for men and women will strike the right balance between working population and pensioners. The reforms in private pension provision, most of which will come into force in April, will improve the security of pension funds without placing excessive burdens on employers, and strengthen the whole system of pension provision.

Jobseeker's allowance was introduced in October 1996 to help people back into work by providing more assistance in their search for a job and work incentives such as the back to work bonus, and to target resources on those most in need.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is the first legislation of its kind anywhere in Europe. From 2 December 1996, the Act makes it unlawful for an employer with 20 or more staff—employers with fewer than this number are exempt from the Act's employment provisions—unjustifiably to treat a disabled employee or prospective employee less favourably than other people for a reason relating to his or her disability and for service providers to deny disabled people access to their services. The Act also creates new powers to set minimum access standards for new buses, taxis, trains and trams. The Act also established the National Disability Council to advise the Government on matters relating to the elimination of discrimination against disabled people and the operation of the Act.

A three-year pilot of the earnings top-up scheme was launched in October 1996 to help people without dependant children enter and remain in work. We are also investing £20 million in our "parent plus" initiative which, from April, will offer help and advice to lone parents who want to work. A range of options will be tested over three years, including the involvement of the private sector.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the number gaining and *(b)* the annual cost of extending payments of incapacity benefit for four weeks once a claimant has found a job. [15796]

Mr. Burt: Information on which to base such an estimate will not be available until early 1998 when results are due from the current survey of people leaving incapacity benefit.

Benefits (Effects of Study Rule)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the annual cost and *(b)* the numbers gaining, broken down by benefit for (i) under-19-year-olds, (ii) those between 19 years and 25 years and (iii) over-25-year-olds of allowing a 21 hours per week study rule across all means-tested contributory and non-contributory benefits. [15868]

Mr. Roger Evans: There is insufficient information on which to base an estimate.

Allowing a 21-hour study rule would affect only the income-related benefits and both the income-based and contribution-based routes into jobseeker's allowance because other benefits already allow study of up to 21 hours without loss of entitlement, or place no restrictions on hours of study generally.

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the minimum age requirements enforced by his Department. [15920]

Mr. Burt: The minimum age at which social security benefits become payable, and liability for national insurance contributions commences, is usually 16 years. Other minimum ages are given in the table.

Benefit description	*Minimum age (years, unless stated otherwise)*
Category A and B retirement pension; graduated retirement benefit	65 (men)
	60 (women)
Category C and D retirement pension	80
Age addition	80
Widow's pension	45
Attendance allowance	65
Disability living allowance:	
Care component;	three months
Mobility component.	five months
Jobseeker's allowance (JSA)	16
JSA pensioner premium	Claimant or partner aged 60
JSA enhanced pensioner premium	Partner aged 75
JSA higher pensioner premium	Partner aged 80 if awarded on age grounds, or claimant or partner aged 60 if awarded on disability or incapacity grounds
Industrial injuries disablement benefit	No minimum age specified
Retirement allowance	65 (men)
	60 (women)
Industrial injuries benefit	No minimum age
Income support	18—available from age 16 for certain vulnerable groups
Income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit pensioner premium	Claimant or partner aged 60
Income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit enhanced pensioner premium	Claimant or partner aged 75
Income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit higher pensioner premium	Claimant or partner aged 80 if awarded on age grounds, or 60 if awarded on disability or incapacity grounds
War disablement pensions: age allowances	65
War widow's pension: age allowances	65, 70 and 80
Higher rate of war widow's pension	40, if childless and capable of self support
War pensions: higher allowance to child "over the age limit" and incapable of self support	18
Child benefit	None
One parent benefit	None

Benefit description	*Minimum age (years, unless stated otherwise)*
Guardian's allowance	None
Earnings top-up[2]	18
Council tax benefit	18

[1] For income-based jobseeker's allowance 16 to 17-year-olds have no entitlement to benefit as such because the Government guarantee a place on training or in education. Certain vulnerable 16 to 17-year-olds are able to claim under the severe hardship provisions.
[2] Earnings top-up is being piloted in eight areas of the country, for three years from October 1996. It is an income-related benefit for those without dependent children (single people and couples) who work 16 hours a week or more.

Housing and Council Tax Benefits

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on representations received by the Social Security Advisory Committee about the changes announced on 26 November 1996 in housing benefit and council tax benefit; and when he expects to announce his conclusions on this consultation. [16170]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Social Security Advisory Committee will be reporting by the end of this month on the housing benefit changes which were announced on 26 November 1996. We will consider carefully the report before taking final decisions.

Free School Meals

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the number gaining if free school meals were extended to those in receipt of family credit. [16672]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Cost and number gaining from extending entitlement to free school meals to families receiving family credit 1997–98

Estimated cost	£150 million
Number of families gaining	540,000
Number of dependants gaining	1 million

1. Costs are rounded to the nearest £5 million.
2. Gainers are rounded to the nearest 5,000

Income Support

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what has been the number and value of *(a)* overpayments and *(b)* underpayments of income support in each year since its introduction; and what projections he has made of future errors; [17524]

(2) what action has been taken to correct incorrect income support payments; and what amount has been *(a)* recovered, and *(b)* compensated; [17525]

(3) if he will list his Department's estimate of the extent of incorrect income support payments by *(a)* region and *(b)* area. [17526]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 25 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking what has been the number and value of (a) over-payments and (b) under-payments of Income Support (IS) in each year since its introduction; and what projections he has made of future errors; what action has been taken to correct incorrect IS payments; and what amount has been (a) recovered, and (b) compensated; and if he will list his Department's estimate of the extent of incorrect IS payments by (a) region and (b) area.

The number and value of over-payments and under-payments of IS in each year since its introduction and future projections are shown at Appendix A.

Incorrect IS payments are identified and corrected by means of routine checks and case-reviews, or in response to customer queries and appeals.

In addition to routine procedures outlined above, there have been a number of special exercises, both national and local, to identify and correct errors made in specific categories of cases. Two major exercises for which specific records have been kept are a scrutiny of all mortgage cases and as a result of this exercise £77,865,018 million was recovered and £7,640,614 refunded to customers; and a scrutiny of live cases with potential entitlement to Severe Disability Premium and as a result of this exercise arrears of approximately £90 million were paid to customers.

Since April 1991, the total of IS overpayments recovered is £345,180,580. These figures apply to overpayments resulting from a variety of causes, including fraud and customer error. Overpayments arising solely from official error are not normally recovered.

Compensation is given for many reasons including misleading advice and delayed payment of benefit. Records were not kept prior to the inception of the Benefits Agency in April 1991. Since April 1991, the Agency has issued compensation of £18,659,361.87 to IS customers over and above normal benefit entitlement.

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

The estimate of the extent of incorrect IS payments by (a) region and (b) area is not available in the format requested. Information is available by Benefits Agency Area Directorates and Territories not by regions and is shown at Appendix B.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Appendix A: National Audit Office figures for income support error

	Overpayments £ million	*Underpayments* £ million	*Total number of cases found* to be in error
1988–89[1]	125	35	587,925
1989–90	87.6	57.2	626,256
1990–91	115.5	69.7	609,008
1991–92	231.7	86.8	850,070
1992–93	465.2	136.2	925,025
1993–94	540.1	76.6	972,888
1994–95	546.1	182.7	925,911
1995–96	485.4	167.5	879,357
1996–97	363.5	131.7	—

[1] These figures include income support errors, classed by the National Audit Office, as "non-cash" errors, which represent no overall financial loss or gain to the department, as they are offset by under or overpayments of another benefit. Figures for subsequent years exclude non-cash errors.

Figures for 1988–89 to 1995–96 are National Audit Office estimates. Figures for 1996–97 are a benefits agency projection.

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Appendix B: Percentage of income support payment found to be accurate (1996–97 year to date)

Area directorates (AD)	*Accuracy performance Per cent.*
AD 1 East London and Anglia	76.4
AD 2 Chilterns	78.0
AD 3 London South	76.3
AD 4 West Country	80.1
AD 5 Mercia	81.6
AD 6 West Midlands	82.0
AD 7 Wales	85.3
Southern territory total	79.4
AD 8 North West Coast	80.9
AD 9 Greater Manchester	81.2
AD 10 Yorkshire	81.5
AD 11 Tyne Tees	84.1
AD 12 West of Scotland	83.6
AD 13 East of Scotland	84.8
Northern territory total	82.6

Estimates of monetary value of error are not statistically valid at area level. Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Monetary value of error for 1996–97 projected by the benefits agencies quality support teams

	Underpayments £ million	*Overpayments* £ million	*Total* £ million	*Percentage of programme* expenditure
Southern Territory	100.6	287.3	387.9	3.5
Northern Territory	31.1	76.2	107.3	1.6
National	131.7	363.5	513.4	2.8

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the conclusion of his review of income support direct payments announced on 19 July. [17970]

Mr. Lilley: I have completed my review of direct payments for fuel and water, which included consultation with over 60 interested groups including the regulators, utility companies and consumer groups.

I have concluded that the direct payments scheme continues to play an important role in protecting benefit recipients who might otherwise be at risk of having their fuel or water supply disconnected, and for whom no alternative payment methods are suitable, but it is clear that the scheme is used by some people who are capable of making their own arrangements with the utility company. Those who are capable of managing their own financial affairs should be encouraged to do so. I therefore intend to maintain the scheme for the foreseeable future, as a last resort measure to avoid disconnection, but to make more explicit the circumstances whereby direct payments remain appropriate.

I intend to introduce amending regulations to define more clearly the eligibility conditions for the scheme, and to agree with each utility industry a new code of practice on the application of the new rules.

Copies of the report of my review are available in the Library.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate for newly retired *(a)* pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples in 1990–91, 1992 and 1994–95 (i) average investment income by quintile and by decile, (ii) average occupational pension income by quintile and by decile, (iii) average personal pension income by quintile and by decile, (iv) average state earnings-related pension scheme income by quintile and by decile and (v) average income from all sources by quintile and by decile. [17474]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

All recently retired pensioner units average income breakdown by quintile

Income source	*Quintile 1* 1990–91 £	1992 £	'1994–95 £	*Quintile 2* 1990–91 £	1992 £	'1994–95 £	*Quintile 3* 1990–91 £	1992 £	'1994–95 £
Investment income	4.50	21.80	4.70	8.10	9.10	7.20	18.10	23.20	11.20
Occupational pension	5.70	9.40	7.20	12.70	14.10	21.50	33.40	37.50	41.00
Gross income	96.60	121.80	105.60	114.00	124.70	137.70	162.50	176.10	170.00
Net income	84.70	95.90	97.20	102.60	115.20	127.10	143.40	158.60	156.50

' Denotes a small sample size these estimates should be used with particular caution.

1. The figures provided are subject to statistical variability and should be used with caution.

2. All incomes quoted are rounded to the nearest 10p, at July 1994 prices. All average amounts are means except where otherwise stated. Components may not sum, due to rounding.

3. A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over state pension age or a couple where the man, defined as the head, is over SPA. A recently retired pensioner unit is defined as a pensioner unit where the head of the benefit unit is less than five years older than SPA.

4. Due to inadequate sample sizes, information cannot be given for recently retired pensioners by decile groups and recently retired pensioner couples for 1992 and 1994–95.

5. The family expenditure survey does not separately identify income from either personal pensions or state earnings-related pensions. Any personal pension details are recorded as investment income.

6. Quintiles have been constructed based on the equivalised before housing costs net income distribution. This is consistent with table 5 of "The Pensioners' Income Series 1994–95."

7. Comparisons of estimates from different years may not give reliable results. It is recommended that these estimates are used to indicate trends over time and that year on year comparisons should be avoided.

Income source	Quintile 4			Quintile 5			Total		
	1990–91	1992	[1]1994–95	1990–91	1992	[1]1994–95	1990–91	1992	1994–95
Investment income	42.00	42.50	27.20	146.80	130.30	118.10	43.80	45.30	33.50
Occupational pension	63.10	68.90	78.00	131.60	169.30	186.50	49.20	59.80	66.60
Gross income	234.80	242.90	238.20	462.80	507.70	529.80	213.90	234.50	235.60
Net income	201.20	215.80	210.00	370.00	411.50	418.80	180.20	199.30	201.40

[1] Denotes a small sample size these estimates should be used with particular caution.

1. The figures provide are subject to statistical variability and should be used with caution.
2. All incomes quoted are rounded to the nearest 10p, at July 1994 prices. All average amounts are means except where otherwise stated. Components may not sum, due to rounding.
3. A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over state pension age or a couple where the man, defined as the head, is over SPA. A recently retired pensioner unit is defined as a pensioner unit where the head of the benefit unit is less than five years older than SPA.
4. Due to inadequate sample sizes, information cannot be given for recently retired pensioners by decile groups and recently retired pensioner couples for 1992 and 1994–95.
5. The family expenditure survey does not separately identify income from either personal pensions or state earnings-related pensions. Any personal pension details are recorded as investment income.
6. Quintiles have been constructed based on the equivalised before housing costs net income distribution. This is consistent with table 5 of "The Pensioners' Income Series 1994–95".
7. Comparisons of estimates from different years may not give reliable results. It is recommended that these estimates are used to indicate trends over time and that year on year comparisons should be avoided.

Recently retired pensioner couples average income breakdown by quintile, 1990–91

Income source	Quintile 1 £	Quintile 2 £	Quintile 3 £	Quintile 4 £	Quintile 5 £	Total £
Investment income	6.00	14.20	23.20	50.40	171.40	53.00
Occupational pension	8.40	18.60	44.20	74.40	179.70	65.00
Gross income	112.30	147.60	198.90	276.20	563.30	259.50
Net income	97.80	132.60	175.90	237.20	450.80	218.70

Notes:

1. The figures provided are subject to statistical variability and should be used with caution.
2. All incomes quoted are rounded to the nearest 10p, at July 1994 prices. All average amounts are means except where otherwise stated. Components may not sum, due to rounding.
3. A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over state pension age or a couple where the man, defined as the head, is over SPA. A recently retired pensioner unit is defined as a pensioner unit where the head of the benefit unit is less than five years older than SPA.
4. Due to inadequate sample sizes, information cannot be given for recently retired pensioners by decile groups and recently retired pensioner couples for 1992 and 1994–95.
5. The family expenditure survey does not separately identify income from either personal pensions or state earnings-related pensions. Any personal pension details are recorded as investment income.
6. Quintiles have been constructed based on the equivalised before housing costs net income distribution. This is consistent with table 5 of "The Pensioners; Incomes Series 1994–95."
7. Comparisons of estimates from different years may not give reliable results. It is recommended that these estimates are used to indicate trends over time and that year on year comparisons should be avoided.

Source:

Pensioners' incomes series 1990–91, 1992 and 1994–95, largely based on the family expenditure survey for each year.

Divorcees' Pension Rights

Sir Roger Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish his proposals for the treatment of pension rights on divorce. [18137]

Mr. Lilley: The Government published a Green Paper on this topic in July 1996. We promised that, following the consultation period, a White Paper would be published in the spring. I have today published the White Paper "Pension rights on Divorce" (Cm 3564). Copies are available in the Library.

Social Fund

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to make changes to the administration of the discretionary social fund. [17969]

Mr. Roger Evans: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is introducing minor amendments to his directions and guidance on the help available from the discretionary social fund. These changes, which will take effect from 7 April, include amendments in consequence of the introduction of the Housing Act 1996 and the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, in England and Wales, and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. They also include a range of other minor improvements, the need for which we have identified in the course of our routine monitoring of the social fund.

Details of these changes have been placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 27 February 1997

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Courts (Induction Loop Systems)

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many courts in England and Wales provide induction loop systems for people with hearing impairments; and what steps his Department has taken to raise awareness in the courts of the special needs of dual-sensory-impaired people. [17117]

Mr. Streeter: There are 40 courts in the Court Service with induction loop or infra-red systems for people with hearing impairments. Our records do not enable us to identify separately how any magistrates courts have induction loop systems, but we have provided grant funding to allow at least 50 courts to have induction loop or infra-red systems for people with hearing impairments.

Through various building guides and published standards, we have made staff, local authorities and magistrates courts committees aware of the features to be included in new buildings and, subject to building constraints and funding availability, in older buildings, to meet the requirements of disabled people. Training courses for all new managers in the Court Service include sessions on disability awareness and managers are expected to raise these issues among their staff. Each court has customer liaison officer who is available to help disabled court users. The Court Service is currently producing an action plan to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Under section 22A(6) of the Justices of the Peace Act 1979, all magistrates court committees are required to have regard to the needs of court users who are disabled in discharging their responsibilities for the administration of the magistrates courts. My officials are currently working, in collaboration with a variety of disability organisations, on the production of a good practice guide covering disabled court users which is aimed at magistrates courts committees. The aim of the guide is to raise awareness in the magistrates courts of the special needs of all court users with disabilities. The guide will be published later in the year.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Servants (London Supplement)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the annual cost of paying a London supplement to civil servants working in London in the last year for which figures are available. [17686]

Mr. Freeman: The London weighting allowance was abolished on 1 October 1994. At that time, there were three levels of London weighting paid to non-industrial staff: inner London £1,776 per person per annum; intermediate zone £1,015; and outer London £736. On the basis of where staff were employed on 1 April 1994, the total annual cost of the London allowances was £151 million. Since 1 April 1994, Departments and agencies have had delegated authority to determine the pay and allowances of their own staff.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Drug Tests)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in what circumstances video recording occurs of prisoners giving urine samples for random drug tests; [16357]

(2) how many prisoners have *(a)* been fined, *(b)* lost remission and *(c)* been subject to other disciplinary sanction for refusing to co-operate with a random drug test before a video camera. [16358]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 27 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the circumstances under which video-recording occurs of prisoners giving urine samples for random drug testing; and disciplinary sanctions resulting from prisoners refusing to co-operate with such a test before a video camera.

There are no circumstances under which a prisoner has given a sample of urine for the purposes of drug testing while being video-recorded. Consequently, no prisoners have been disciplined for refusal to co-operate with such conditions.

Prison Visits (Recording)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the video recording of legal visits at *(a)* Belmarsh, *(b)* other prisons and *(c)* legal visiting rooms; [16049]

(2) on what statutory basis the video recording of legal visits is permitted; [16050]

(3) in what circumstances audio recording of legal visiting rooms is permitted. [16051]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answers 26 February 1997]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tam Dalyell, dated 27 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about video and audio recording of legal visits.

I shall deal with your second and third Questions first. Prison Rule 37 provides that legal visits shall take place out of hearing but in the sight of an officer.

One way to achieve this is to use CCTV without sound, recording the CCTV image on video tape to allow an officer to review the visit at a convenient time. The camera facilities used do not allow any documentation that may be open on the visits table to be read.

The Prison Service does not permit the audio recording of legally privileged visits.

Belmarsh prison uses video-recorded CCTV without sound in the legal visits facility in its special secure unit (SSU). A system similar to that used in the SSU at Belmarsh is used in the other SSUs at Full Sutton and Whitemoor. CCTV without sound is used in the non-SSU legal visits rooms at Full Sutton, Long Lartin, Frankland and Wakefield, and can be video recorded if necessary. Information about the rest of the estate is not held centrally and accurate information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Belmarsh Prison

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours per day on average over the past 12 months prisoners in special secure units at Belmarsh prison have been confined to their cells; and if he will make a statement. [17309]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 26 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, dated 27 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the hours prisoners have been confined to their cells in the special secure units (SSU) at Belmarsh prison.

Prisoners are confined to their cells at all times outside of the core day. The core day at Belmarsh SSU is from 0830 to 2030 hours. In addition, during the core day prisoners are confined to their cells for the following periods of time:

On Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday for 3 hoursjy40 minutes.

On Wednesday for 6 hours and 15 minutes.

On Saturday and Sunday for 5 hours and 25 minutes.

The figures quoted are averages calculated over the last 12 months.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations have been received from the solicitor representing Brian McHugh about the confidentiality and conditions for him to interview his client at Belmarsh prison; and if he will make a statement. [17368]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 26 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, dated 27 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about representations received from the solicitor representing Brian McHugh.

Mr. McHugh has been categorised as an exceptional risk Category A prisoner. Such prisoners are held in special secure units and are subject to closed visits. In exceptional circumstances an open visit may be allowed with the approval of the Director of Dispersal Prisons. The Prison Service has received a number of representations from the solicitor representing Mr. McHugh in support of applications for open legal visits.

Prisons (Special Secure Units)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to put into practice the proposals contained in the report on health in the special secure units at Full Sutton, Whitemoor and Belmarsh prisons; and if he will make a statement. [17405]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 26 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 27 February, 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the implementation of the proposals contained in the report on health in the special secure units at Full Sutton, Whitemoor and Belmarsh prions.

Sir Donald Acheson's review of the possible effects on the health of prisoners of the regime in the special secure units contained nine recommendations. Eight of these recommendations endorsed existing policy or have since been implemented through amendments to the SSU Operating Standards.

We cannot accept the recommendation that prisoners in SSUs should have access to open visits with members of their immediate families. The recommendation was qualified by the assertion that it should be possible for the Prison Service to devise a system of open visits which prevented the passage of unauthorised items. The policy of closed visits was introduced in 1995 precisely because it represented—after analysis of the options and taking into account humanitarian concerns—the only guaranteed means of preventing the passage of such items.

Roisin McAliskey

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are to be made to ensure that, if she gives birth while still in detention, Roisin McAliskey is not separated from her child; and if he will ensure that, if Ms McAliskey is extradited, she and her baby will not be separated. [17625]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 25 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Max Madden, dated 27 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your Question about the arrangements to be made if Ms Roisin McAliskey gives birth while still in detention.

Careful consideration is being given to the care of Ms McAliskey's baby should she give birth while detained in prison custody. No decisions have yet been taken. If Ms McAliskey is extradited to Germany, care arrangements will be matters for the German authorities.

Firearms (Amendment) Bill (Administration)

Sir Jerry Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what extra staff are to be taken on to administer the Firearms (Amendment) Bill following its enactment. [17452]

Miss Widdecombe: A new firearms compensation section is to be set up within the Home Office on a short-term basis and will initially comprise 50 staff. Their specific task will be to process claims from those persons who surrender their lawfully held handguns which become prohibited under the Act. Payments will also be made in respect of ancillary equipment used solely in connection with those handguns, and to owners of small calibre pistols who choose not to, or are unable to, join a licensed pistol club. In addition, there will be some new

work arising from the granting of licences for the new pistol clubs. It is expected that this work can be accommodated within existing resources.

Foreign Students (Residence Restrictions)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what restrictions apply to the length of time students from *(a)* Australia, *(b)* Canada, *(c)* New Zealand and *(d)* South Africa may reside in the United Kingdom; and what permits are required. [17355]

Mr. Kirkhope: There is no upper limit on the time an overseas student may remain in the United Kingdom. A student who fully satisfies the requirements of the immigration rules will normally be given leave for the period of his course.

The criteria for leave to enter or remain as a student are set out in the "Statement of Changes in the Immigration Rules", HC 395, as amended, at paragraphs 57 to 62, a copy of which is in the Library.

Nationals of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa do not need to obtain a visa before travelling to the United Kingdom as students. However, they may apply for an entry certificate should they wish to do so.

Criminal Case Papers

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the provisions on the retention of case papers in the code of practice prepared under the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996. [18375]

Mr. Howard: I published a draft code on 4 July 1996 for consultation, modified it in the light of representations received, and laid it before Parliament on 18 December. The draft code required each chief police officer to develop his own policy on the retention of case papers, taking account of certain specified criteria. I received representations that the code should prescribe a national policy on this issue so that each police force followed the same practice. The version of the code which I laid before Parliament on 18 December contains a national policy in that it requires each police force to retain all material obtained by the police in the course of a criminal investigation which might be relevant to the investigation at least until the conclusion of the trial; and if the case resulted in a conviction following a not guilty plea, to retain the material for a further minimum period of one year following summary conviction or three years following conviction on indictment.

At present, police forces are not subject to any statutory requirement to retain material for any specified period. Each police force has its own policy and there is no common practice. The effect of the provisions in the code is to increase protection for defendants by inserting a statutory minimum retention requirement where none exists at present. These provisions leave untouched the current ability of the police to retain material for any length of time beyond that. In very serious and high-profile cases, I would expect the police to continue to retain material for a long time, as they have tended to do under the informal arrangements which currently exist.

Nevertheless, in the light of concerns expressed recently about these provisions, I have concluded that the interests of justice would be better served by an alternative set of requirements. Accordingly, I intend to amend the code of practice so as to require the police to retain material at least until the end of the trial and then, in the event of a conviction, either until the convicted person is released from custody, if the court imposes a custodial sentence, or until six months from the date of conviction, if the court imposes a non-custodial sentence. Where a convicted person is given a short custodial sentence and would be released within six months of conviction, material would still have to be retained for at least six months. If an appeal is in progress at the end of one of these periods, or an application is being considered by the Criminal Cases Review Commission, the period will be extended until the appeal is concluded or the commission makes a decision on the application.

I will lay an amended code of practice before Parliament today.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Deregulation

Mr. Burden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he received following the recent DTI consultation exercise on proposals made by the deregulation task force in respect of employment rights in small firms; which organisations submitted responses; and how the results of the exercise will be made available. [17490]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department received representations from some 90 organisations, businesses and individuals expressing a range of views which we are currently considering. I shall be placing a list of the organisations which replied in the Library of the House.

Departmental Regional Services

Dr. Howells: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff directly employed by the DTI were providing DTI services to the regions in each year from 1990 to date. [17305]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The table shows the number of permanent staff—full-time equivalents—directly employed in the Department's regional offices between 1990 and 1993. In 1994, my Department's regional offices integrated with those of the Departments of the Environment, of Transport and of Employment, as it then was, and the table shows the number of permanent staff employed by DTI in the integrated Government offices from 1994. DTI staff in the GOs may carry out work for other Departments; similarly, staff in the GOs employed by other Departments may provide DTI services.

1 April 1990: 1,004
1 April 1991: 1,013
1 April 1992: 996.5
1 April 1993: 980.5
1 April 1994: 988
1 April 1995: 880.5
1 April 1996: 796.1
1 January 1997: 704.4

Prior to 1 April 1995, part-time staff were counted as 0.5 of a full-time equivalent. Staff working fewer than 10 hours per week were excluded from the count. From 1 April 1995, the full-time equivalent of all part-time staff was based on actual hours worked.

Institute of Food Research

Dr. Strang: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total expenditure of the Institute of Food Research in each year since 1986 in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices. [17658]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The figures are shown in the table.

Institute of Food Research expenditure—1986–96

Year	Current cash expenditure £000	At constant cash prices[3] £000	Capital cash £000
1986–87	11,541	17,838	1,927
1987—88	12,473	18,304	1,380
1988–89	13,321	18,322	1,307
1989–90	13,810	17,754	3,123
1990–91[1]	13,580	16,168	4,564
1991–92[2]	14,083	15,757	1,200
1992–93	14,834	15,927	1,334
1993–94	14,676	15,314	1,119
1994–95	15,162	15,545	1,022
1995–96	15,448	15,448	1,417

Notes:

[1] Bristol site closed.

[2] Move to Whiteknights site at Reading (Shinfield site closed).

[3] Using November 1996 GDP deflators.

Genetic Testing (Insurance)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the new guidelines issued by the Association of British Insurers relating to the use of the results of genetic testing. [17366]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* I welcome the statement by the Association of British Insurers outlining its current position on genetic testing and the use of genetic information in the underwriting process. The Government have been urging the ABI to make constructive proposals to deal with public concern on this important issue and I am pleased that some progress has been made. The prospect of a wider range of genetic tests becoming available in the future, with greater sophistication in the interpretation of test results, means that the implications for insurance must be kept under constant review. My Department, with the Department of Health, has established the Human Genetic Advisory Commission to examine this sort of issue, taking account of continuing development in genetic science.

Industrial Action and Trade Unions

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library copies of the views submitted in response to the Green Paper on industrial action and trade unions (Cm 3470). [17920]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I shall arrange for a list of respondents to the Green Paper to be placed in the Library of the House shortly after the end of the consultation period on 28 February. Since respondents were not asked to indicate whether they were willing for their comments to be published, it would not be appropriate to make the responses themselves available. However, some respondents may be willing to supply copies of their comments on request.

TRANSPORT

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each franchise let since 13 January the details of payments to or from the franchisee in the same format as his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *119–20*, indicating the support previously paid to British Rail for the franchises and the amounts of administered profit included within such support. [17191]

Mr. Watts: The information is set out in the tables.

£ million

	Cost of advisors	1995–96 Budgeted passenger revenue	Budgeted support to BR for whole year	Including administered profit[1]	Support paid at franchising (year 1)	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
InterCity West Coast	1.96	251.80	92.53	19.12	76.800	68.362	56.091	53.675	52.254
North London Lines	1.12	64.30	54.87	4.87	48.600	35.501	29.627	26.415	23.040
Thameslink	1.02	82.10	16.43	5.34	2.500	-6.748	-16.204	-22.466	-23.224
Central Trains[1]	1.14	75.80	198.10	7.64	187.549	173.365	153.681	145.794	140.922
North West Regional Railways[1]	1.42	54.30	191.90	6.77	184.900	168.900	153.411	140.815	134.828
Regional Railways North East[1]	1.40	76.30	223.20	7.80	224.539	197.054	175.791	164.311	156.327
ScotRail[1]	1.31	117.70	292.30	11.17	280.100	264.841	250.539	234.911	220.351
Total	9.37	722.30	1,069.33	62.71	1,004.99	901.28	802.94	743.46	704.50
Savings on BR support					64.34	168.06	266.39	325.88	364.83
Cumulative savings					64.34	232.40	498.79	824.67	1,189.50

£ million

	Year 6	*Year 7*	*Year 8*	*Year 9*	*Year 10*	*Year 11*	*Year 12*	*Year 13*	*Year 14*	*Year 15*
InterCity West Coast	–3.885	–52.705	–55.840	–72.029	–126.625	–151.557	–167.600	–184.528	–202.194	–220.305
North London Lines	19.968	16.919	15.805	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Thameslink	–27.015	–28.434	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Central Trains[1]	136.638	132.645	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
North West Regional Railways[1]	129.745	125.518	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Regional Railways North East[1]	150.493	145.579	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
ScotRail[1]	209.254	202.494	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Total	615.20	542.02	–40.04	–72.03	–126.63	–151.56	–167.60	–184.53	–202.19	–220.31
Savings on BR support	454.13	527.31	187.44	164.56	219.16	244.09	260.13	277.06	294.72	312.84
Cumulative savings	1,643.63	2,170.94	2,358.38	2,522.94	2,742.09	2,986.18	3,246.31	3,523.37	3,818.09	4,130.93

Notes:
[1] The BR support figures for these franchises have been restated on a comparable basis to the franchise agreement and include budgeted payments from the passenger transport executives.
[2] Not covered by the franchise.
The year 1 franchise payment is the amount to be paid for 1997–98. Any amounts to be paid in 1996–97 have been excluded from this table.
It is expected that these franchises will commence between 2 March and 1 April 1997.
Payments to the franchising director appear as negative amounts.
All payments are real amounts.
Advisor costs are correct to January 1997.
This table makes no assumption about the potential for cost savings if the franchisees had remained in BR ownership.

Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersens, *(c)* BMI, *(d)* Capita and *(e)* Sema since 1992 and the broad function to be carried out by the contractor and the value of the contract in each case. [17607]

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is set out in the table. The value of individual contracts has not been revealed on the grounds that this information is commercially confidential.

Contractor	*Nature of Contract*
1992	
Capita	Financial Reporting Review
1993	
BMI	Health Screening
Capita	Financial Services
Capita	Financial Reporting Review
Capita	Market Testing
Capita	Financial Adviser
EDS	Provision of Computer Services
EDS	Provision of Computer Services
EDS	Provision of Computer Services
EDS	Provision of Computer Services
Sema	Office Systems Feasibility Study
1994	
EDS	Phase I of IS Strategy
Sema/BAE	Study of new and combined Technologies and Optical Technique in Variable Message Signs
Sema	IT Consultancy
1995	
Capita	Marketing Support for Staff Welfare
1996	
Capita	Administration of Driving Theory Test
Capita	Advice on the production of a new Resource Accounting and Management Information System
Capita	Development of Training Strategy
Capita/RAS	General Recruitment Services
EDS	Phase II of IS Strategy

Freight Facilities Grants

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what factors underlie the overestimate in the budget for freight facilities grants for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [16526]

Mr. Watts: The 1994–95 freight grants budget was £13.347 million. This was notionally split into £3.347 million freight facilities grants and £10 million for the new track access grants. Spend on FFG at year end was £2,803 million. The shortfall was caused by two large claims not being submitted until the following year.

The 1995–96 freight grants budget was £14,415 million, notionally split into £3.415 million for FFG and £11 million for TAG. FFG spend was £4.007 million.

The provision made for TAG in these years was based on independent consultancy assessment of rail freight traffic likely to face difficulty in meeting newly introduced Railtrack track access charges. The first TAG awards were made during 1996 and payments are now being made.

Pescado (Sinking)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the marine accidents investigation branch report into the sinking of the fishing vessel Pescado; and if he will make a statement. [17938]

Mr. Bowis: The Secretary of State has not yet received the report of the marine accidents investigation branch inspector's inquiry into the sinking of the fishing vessel Pescado. Normally, such a report would be submitted within one year of the incident. The delay in this case was due to the criminal prosecution of the operator of

the Pescado and subsequent appeals. Now that criminal proceedings are at an end, the MAIB will complete the process prior to publication of the report, which is required by the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 1994 and will submit the report to the Secretary of State for him to consider in due course. In line with the requirements of these regulations, the Secretary of State normally publishes reports into incidents shortly after they have been received.

Highways Agency

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he plans to amend the Highways Agency's 1996–97 key business plan targets. [18334]

Mr. Watts: I have reviewed the Highways Agency's key targets and decided that the business plan should be amended to reflect decisions taken during the year.

The following 1996–97 targets are deferred, reflecting the new timing or priority of these schemes. They should be deleted from annex D of the plan: "Roads Programme Completion, Starts and Other Milestones":

A650 Hard Ings Road Improvement: (Public Inquiry)

A40 Gypsy Corner Improvement: (Award of Contract)

A40 Western Circus Junction Improvement: (Award of Contract)

London Primary Route Signing Project: (Award of Contract)

A30/A36/A46/A303: (DBFO Tender Invitation).

Milestones which are added to annex D are:

A1 Tempsford Junction Improvement: (Publication of Orders).

A copy of the Highways Agency business plan 1996–97 is in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

South Yorkshire Supertram

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, column *319*, what estimate he has made of the effect of the further £20 million in credit approvals on the South Yorkshire supertram, on council tax rates of Sheffield, Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster following his announcement; and if he will make a statement. [17511]

Mr. Curry: The £20 million supplementary credit approval offered to South Yorkshire passenger transport authority will allow it to set a lower levy in 1997–98. We estimate that each £20 million in the levy is equivalent to around £56 in council tax for band D two-adult households in each of the four South Yorkshire districts.

Estates Renewal Challenge Fund (Wythenshawe)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the effect of and implications for Wythenshawe of the announcement made by the Minister of State for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration in Manchester on 18 February in relation to round 2 of the estates renewal challenge fund; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the announcement. [17289]

Mr. Curry: My announcement of the successful bids for funds from round 2 of the estates renewal challenge fund is good news for the residents of Wythenshawe. Manchester have been allocated almost £21 million towards the costs of the regeneration of 7,000 properties in the Wythenshawe area. If the tenants agree, their homes will transfer to a new local housing company and will then benefit from an estimated additional £64 million of investment, beyond what would be possible if the housing stayed with the council. This area is already a successful bidder for Government support under the single regeneration budget so the estate transfer will enable a comprehensive area renewal policies to be pursued by public-private sector partnership. The text of the announcement on the estates renewal challenge fund has been published in the *Official Report*. I refer the hon. Member to column *420* on Monday 17 February.

Wild Birds

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the licences issued in 1996 by his Department for the destruction of wild birds. [17836]

Mr. Clappison: Details of licences issued by my Department to kill wild birds are contained in the report by the United Kingdom to the European Community on derogations under article 9 of the directive on the conservation of wild birds, 79/409/EEC. The latest report for which figures are available covers 1995. Figures are not yet available for 1996, but when the report has been prepared a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Terrorism

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance he intends to provide towards the costs of clearing up after the terrorist attacks on London docklands and Manchester city centre on 9 February 1996 and 15 June 1996. [18142]

Mr. Curry: The Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report No. 26 has today been laid before the House. The report provides for grant—up to a total of £2.5 million—to be made available to the London borough of Tower Hamlets, Manchester city council and Greater Manchester Police Authority towards the costs of dealing with the aftermath and loss of income suffered as a consequence of the terrorist attacks of 9 February 1996 on south quay on the Isle of Dogs and of 15 June 1996 on Manchester city centre.

Subject to the approval of the House, grant will be payable on those costs necessarily incurred by each authority in the six months following the explosions as a direct result of responding to and clearing up after the incidents. The authorities will also receive some recompense for loss of income during the same period directly or indirectly attributable to the explosions. Insurable expenditure or loss of income will not, however, be eligible for grant; nor will costs which are eligible for other grants or credit approvals.

Direct Labour (Wolverhampton)

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the response of Wolverhampton metropolitan borough council to the

notice served on it on 11 September 1996 in respect of its decision to assign highway maintenance, winter maintenance and street lighting work to its direct labour organisation. [18141]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has considered the response made by the authority on 10 October. He has today served a direction on the authority because it still appears to him that the authority acted in an anti-competitive manner in assigning work to its direct labour organisation. He took this view because of the way in which the authority undertook the evaluation of bids. The effect of the direction is to require the authority to seek consent if, when it retenders the work at the end of the current assignment, it wishes to continue to carry it out in-house.

Granny Annexes

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response was received to the consultation paper on proposed changes in the treatment of granny annexes and similar self-contained units of accommodation when they form part of a larger property. [18376]

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I proposed changing the ways in which council tax is assessed for self-contained units of accommodation when they form part of a larger property. We consulted with local authorities and organisations representing the elderly and disabled. The list of responses received has been placed in the Library of the House. The responses were overwhelmingly positive. We have accepted the views of many respondents that our objectives can be achieved more simply by means of an exemption.

We now propose that from 1 April 1997 any part of a property, such as an annexe, which is occupied by a dependent relative of the family in the other part of the building, will be an exempt dwelling, where "dependent" means:

(a) aged 65 years or more,

(b) severely mentally impaired within the meaning given in paragraph 2 of schedule 1 to the Local Government Finance Act 1992, or

(c) substantially and permanently disabled (whether by illness injury, congenital deformity or otherwise).

and "relative" means: spouse, parent, grandparent, child, stepchild, grandchild, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, nephew or niece, or the parent or child of such a relative, including a relationship by marriage and of the half-blood.

These changes will apply in England and in Wales.

Landlord and Tenant Report

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take in the light of the Law Commission's report, "Landlord and Tenant: Responsibility for State and Condition of Property Law", Com. No. 238. [18377]

Mr. Clappison: I am grateful to the Law Commission for its very full and helpful analysis of this area of the law in England and Wales.

Of the commission's four main recommendations for change, we agree that the law should be amended so that, in respect of new leases, etcetera created after the commencement of the new provisions:

there should be implied into every lease, subject to the exceptions listed below, a covenant that the landlord shall keep the premises in repair, to a standard which is appropriate having regard to the age, character and prospective life of the premises and to their locality. This would not apply to a lease of a dwelling house for a term of less than seven years; to a lease of an agricultural holding; to a farm business tenancy; or to an oral lease. Nor would it apply in cases where there was an express repairing covenant in the lease, or the implied covenant was expressly excluded in the lease. Where the premises which are leased form part only of a building, and the landlord has an interest in other associated premises within the building, a similar repairing covenant would apply in respect of the associated premises.

a court should have a power to decree specific performance of a repairing obligation in any lease or tenancy

the law of waste should not longer apply in most cases, and the implied covenant that a tenant will use premises let to him in a tenantlike manner should be abolished. Instead, an implied statutory covenant or duty should be created by which any tenant or licensee would undertake to take proper care of the premises, including any common parts of the building; to make good any damage wilfully done to them by him or by others with a right to be on the premises; and not to carry out works to the property which would be detrimental to the landlord's or licensor's interest.

The commission also recommended that, with certain exceptions, there should be implied into a lease of a dwelling house for a term of less than seven years a covenant by the lessor that the dwelling is fit for human habitation at the start of the lease and that the lessor will keep it fit during the lease. We are not yet able to come to a view on this recommendation, since a review of the fitness standard is currently taking place.

Once that review is complete, we will resume consideration of the commission's recommendation on fitness of dwellings and, when we have reached a decision, seek a suitable legislative opportunity for the implementation of the agreed proposals.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for extending the non-fossil fuel obligation subsidy to facilities which operate anaerobic digestion and energy recovery. [17520]

Mr. Page: I have been asked to reply.

Energy recovery facilities which employ anaerobic digestion have been eligible to bid for contracts under the non-fossil fuel obligation. NFFO policy will be reviewed before the next order, NFFO5, is announced.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Public Appointments

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will name the members of the independent appointment panels or committees

established to advise on appointments to non-departmental public bodies made by her since July 1995. [10275]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The first Department of National Heritage public appointments advisory panel was held in September 1996. The following are advisory panel members:

Professor Dawn Ades
Dr. Eric Anderson
Dr. John Ashworth
Averil Burgess OBE
Professor Averil Cameron
Dame Elizabeth Esteve-Coll DBE
Matthew Evans
The right hon. Lord Faringdon
Professor Sir Brian Follet
Sir Christopher France GCB
Sir Ernest Hall OBE
Sir Denys Henderson
Dr. Anne McLaren DBE
Michael Moriarty CB
John Neill CBE
Dennis Stevenson CBE
Sir Rodney Walker
Sir David Wilson

Sports Clubs and Recreational Charities

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what guidance has been issued to valuation officers when assessing the rateable values of premises occupied by voluntary sports clubs and recreational charities; and if she will make a statement. [18276]

Mr. Sproat: Following consultations with the National Playing Field Society and the Central Council for Physical Recreation, the Valuation Office agency has issued additional guidance to valuation officers about the rating of premises occupied by voluntary sports clubs and recreational charities. This further guidance has been agreed with the representative bodies I have mentioned, and gives advice on a number of rating valuation aspects including ability to pay and lottery funding. In addition, it should assist with the speedier settlement of any appeals by occupiers of the type of property in question.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) is the Treasury Minister responsible for the Valuation Office agenda and she, like me, welcomes this useful step which in some circumstances should be of benefit to voluntary sports clubs and recreational charities.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Overseas Aid

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many countries currently contribute 0.7 per cent. or more of gross domestic product to overseas aid; and if he will make a statement. [17739]

Dr. Liam Fox: Four Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries—Denmark, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands—contribute 0.7 per cent. or more of gross national product to overseas development assistance. In 1995, the UK provided 0.28 per cent. of GNP for development assistance-above the average for all donors of 0.27 per cent.

The UK was second only to the Netherlands in total—public and private—resource flows to developing countries, contributing 1.38 per cent. of GNP—ahead of the UN target of 1 per cent.

International Fund for Agricultural Development

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the final outcome of the negotiations to replenish the international fund for agricultural development; and what will be the United Kingdom contributions. [18275]

Dr. Liam Fox: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development announced that agreement was reached last week on the fourth replenishment of the international fund for agricultural development. With pledges of around $360 million from the developed countries, some $100 million from the oil producers and developing countries together, the release by the developed countries of some $16 million from the third replenishment, and anticipated reflows and investment income, IFAD should be able to maintain a very satisfactory level of annual lending commitments over the next three years.

The UK's contribution to the fourth replenishment will be $22.01 million—£13.6 million—for which parliamentary approval will be sought in due course. In addition, we will release our share—rather less than $1 million—of the funds previously blocked under the third replenishment: this is not a new financial commitment, promissory notes for the amount having already been lodged.

I am pleased to say that the UK, as convenor of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development group, the largest of the donor groups, played an influential role in securing agreement on the fourth replenishment.

TREASURY

Income Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the first year revenue which would be raised by the Exchequer from a 50 per cent. rate of income tax on taxable incomes of over £100,000 per annum. [16564]

Mr. Jack: The estimated first year yield at 1997–98 income levels of introducing a new rate of 50 per cent. on taxable incomes above £100,000 is £660 million; the full year yield is £1.4 billion. It does not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of the new rate of tax.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16790]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The table gives the number of written and oral questions answered by Treasury Ministers since 1982–83. Figures for earlier years are not available.

Session	*Written*	*Oral*
1982–83	1,343	283
1983–84	2,743	591
1984–85	2,225	498
1985–86	1,680	381
1986–87	1,340	157
1987–88	3,244	464
1988–89	2,694	330
1989–90	2,145	338
1990–91	1,465	251
1991–92	859	148
1992–93	2,857	402
1993–94	1,742	217
1994–95	2,031	246
1995–96	1,621	251
1996–97[1]	1,048	120

[1] To 25 February.

The analyses sought of questions not answered substantively are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Death Rate

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the death rate for *(a)* the weeks ending 3 January, 10 January, 17 January, 24 January and 31 January and *(b)* the nearest equivalent week in each of the previous five years; [16905]

(2) if he will list for each of the past five years *(a)* the highest three-weekly death rate recorded by the registrar-general and *(b)* the average weekly death rate for each January. [16767]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Rhodri Morgan, dated 27 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question asking how many deaths occurred in (a) the week ending 3rd January, 10th January, 17th January, 24th January and 31st January and (b) the nearest equivalent week in each of the previous five years. The numbers of deaths in England and Wales are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Number of deaths which occurred in England and Wales

	Weeks ending					
	3rd January	*10th January*	*17th January*	*24th January*	*31st January*	*January average*
1992	13,848	13,846	12,985	12,301	12,668	13,130
1993	15,568	13,545	12,510	11,740	11,481	12,969
1994	13,495	13,256	12,497	12,239	11,662	12,630
1995	12,894	13,025	12,483	12,267	12,296	12,593
1996[1]	15,879	14,964	13,204	12,109	12,243	13,680
1997[1]	16,612	17,255	15,699	13,774	12,012	15,070

[1] Death occurrences for 1996 and 1997 are provisional. Figures for 1997 are the latest available. They will be incomplete owing to some January deaths waiting to be registered and added to the ONS database.

You also asked a related question on three-weekly numbers of deaths. The highest numbers of three-weekly death occurrences in England and Wales for each of the past five years are provided in Table 2 on the following page. Table 1 above shows the average weekly deaths for each January in England and Wales.

Table 2: Highest figures of three-weekly deaths in England and Wales

	Figure
1992	38,787
1993	40,926
1994	37,992
1995	44,235
1996[1]	42,831

[1] Death occurrences for 1996 are provisional. I hope this reply has been helpful.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the five most recent occasions prior to 10 January when the weekly death rate recorded in England and Wales exceeded 19,000. [16906]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr Rhodri Morgan, dated 27 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question asking if he will list the five most recent occasions prior to 10th January when the weekly deaths recorded in England and Wales exceeded 19,000. This figure is close to the provisional number of death registrations in the week ending January 10th 1997. A search of similar weekly registrations produced the figures listed in the table below.

Week ending: published	*Recorded number of death registrations in England and Wales, by ONS (OPCS)*
January 6th 1962[1]	19,522
January 2nd 1970[1]	25,007
January 9th 1970[1]	20,914

Week ending: published	Recorded number of death registrations in England and Wales, by ONS (OPCS)
December 22nd 1989[1]	19,180
January 1st 1994	24,375

[1] These figures are from the Registrar-General's Weekly Return which was discontinued in January 1994.

The closure of Register Offices over holiday periods will affect numbers of death registrations. The week following a closure results in offices receiving a backlog of registrations from the previous week. This may contribute to high figures found in the week following a holiday period.

I hope this reply has been helpful.

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17062]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information is as follows for the Treasury, the revenue departments and the Chancellor's agencies—all values being approximate:

HM Treasury

Seventeen items of equipment and furniture valued at £1,300 were recorded as stolen or unaccounted for and 17 IT items valued at £15,600 were recorded as stolen or unaccounted. None of the items was valued over £5,000.

Inland Revenue

Three hundred and eighty-eight items of equipment (or components) with a total value of £460,000, were reported lost or stolen. This includes one item over £5,000, an Escala server valued at £19,000.

HM Customs and Excise

Two hundred and fourteen items of equipment and furniture valued at £87,000 were recorded as losses. Of these, 97 were stolen and 117 were not accountable; 125 IT items valued at £121,000 have been recorded as losses. Of these, 109 were stolen and 16 were not accountable.

Valuation Office

Eleven items of furniture and equipment with a total value of £600 were reported stolen; 72 IT items were recorded stolen, valued £78,700. No items were valued over £5,000.

Paymaster

No equipment or furniture stolen or unaccounted for

The Royal Mint

Three items were unaccounted for with a total of £820. No items have been recorded stolen.

Office for National Statistics

No items of furniture and equipment were reported stolen or unaccounted; 73 IT items were recorded stolen which valued £24,000. No items recorded were valued over £5,000.

National Savings

One item was recorded stolen with a value of £750.

Inheritance Tax (Access to Works of Art)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what actions his Department has taken over the last three years to make the public aware of their rights of access to homes containing works of art granted exemption from inheritance tax; and if he will make a statement. [17185]

Mr. Jack: Since January 1994, the Inland Revenue has issued quarterly press releases publicising the public's right of access, by appointment, to those works of art that are not on general public display and which are listed on the computerised register of conditionally exempt items. Since December 1996, the register has been available on the Internet. The Inland Revenue has also issued a new leaflet, IR 156, "Our heritage—your right to see tax exempt works of art", and a poster to make people aware of their right of access. Copies are available in the Library. The leaflet is available from tax inquiry centres and about 500 museums and public galleries throughout the UK. Copies of the leaflet and poster have also been sent to all chief librarians and to more than 40 university and college art history departments.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of individuals who have visited each home where there are works of art exempted from inheritance tax in the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [17186]

Mr. Jack: No such estimate has been made. The current arrangements are designed to ensure that qualifying objects are preserved, that public access is available, and that people are aware of their right to view items not on general public display. There is no statutory power to require owners of conditionally exempt chattels to keep statistics of the number of people exercising that right.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the annual revenue cost to the Exchequer of exemption from inheritance tax for works of art for which public access is granted; and if he will make a statement. [17184]

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) on 29 January, *Official Report*, column *234*.

National Savings

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement about his plans for use of the private finance initiative in respect of the National Savings agency; [17211]

(2) what plans he has to privatise the National Savings agency; [17210]

(3) for what reasons it is proposed to put National Savings agency functions out to tender under the private finance initiative. [17209]

Mrs. Angela Knight: As I said in my statement of 22 January 1997, there are no plans to privatise National Savings. Our plans are to make sure that National Savings

continues to provide cost-effective funding of the Government's debt through savings products which customers want.

National Savings is exploring whether private finance initiative options could assist the agency further, to become a more modern high-performance organisation, improving value for money for the taxpayer and the service offered to customers. No decisions have been taken about the scope of private sector involvement.

Pension Funds

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much additional tax would be raised if pension funds were subjected to full normal taxation. [17272]

Mr. Jack: I regret that a reliable estimate cannot be made.

Pensions Misselling

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many companies have been prosecuted for pensions misselling. [15752]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 25 February 1997]:* I am not aware of any company to date having been prosecuted for the misselling of pensions. Certain firms, however, have been fined or otherwise disciplined.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the net cost to public funds of abolishing inheritance tax. [17859]

Mr. Jack: Receipts from inheritance tax are forecast to be £1.6 billion in 1997–98.

Statistics (Rounding)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Economic Secretary had seen a copy of page 37 of the second edition of "Plain Figures" prior to her answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, column *19*, concerning rounding; and if she considered enclosing a copy with her answer. [17908]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Yes, and no.

Married Couple's Tax Allowance

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost to public funds of allowing the married couple's tax allowance to be claimed at *(a)* 20 per cent. and *(b)* 23 per cent. [17860]

Mr. Jack: The estimated full-year Exchequer cost at 1997–98 income levels of allowing the married couple's allowance and linked allowances, which includes the additional personal allowance and the widow's bereavement allowance, to be claimed at 20 per cent. is £1.0 billion and at 23 per cent. is £1.5 billion.

Food Poisoning

Dr. Strang: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many food poisoning notifications there were to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys *(a)* in each year since 1982 and *(b)* in 1996 to the latest available date. [17652]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Dr. Gavin Strang, dated 27 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent question asking for the number of notifications of food poisoning to the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys from 1982 to 1996.

The figures you have requested are published annually in the Series MB2 "Communicable disease statistics", copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library for the years up to 1994. Copies of the Series MB2 Quarterly Monitors are also available up to the June quarter of 1996.

The 1995 national data were published in the March 1996 Monitor, whilst the annual total for 1996 is still only provisional. They cover cases notified under the Public Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 1988, and earlier regulations.

Annual notifications of food poisoning for England and Wales

1982: 14,253
1983: 17,735
1984: 20,702
1985: 19,242
1986: 23,948
1987: 29,331
1988: 39,713
1989: 52,557
1990: 52,145
1991: 52,543
1992: 63,347
1993: 68,587
1994: 81,833
1995: 82,041
1996: 83,664 (provisional)

I hope this reply has been helpful.

Tax Law Rewrite Steering Committee

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made by the Tax Law Rewrite Steering Committee established last December. [18076]

Mr. Jack: The steering committee had its first meeting yesterday. Copies of the minutes of this and future meetings will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses as soon as they are available.

This bipartisan committee has a key role in the rewrite project which will deliver real benefits to all taxpayers.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the total amount paid in national insurance contributions, at 1995–96 prices, and as a percentage, by employees with *(a)* more than 200 per cent., *(b)* between 150 per cent. and 200 per

cent., *(c)* between 100 per cent. and 150 per cent., *(d)* between 50 per cent. and 100 per cent. and *(e)* below 50 per cent. of the average earnings of men and women combined in (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1994–95 and (iv) 1995–96; and what was the distribution of total earnings in these years between these groups. [13879]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available is in the table.

	1989–90	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Class 1 employee contributions (£ billion)[1,2]	14.2	17.9	18.9
Percentages in each band			
(a) More than 200 per cent. of average earnings[3]	11.3	12.5	12.8
(b) Between 150 per cent. and 200 per cent. of average earnings[3]	16.5	17.4	17.7
(c) Between 100 per cent. and 150 per cent. of average earnings[3]	34.8	34.1	34.2
(d) Between 50 per cent. and 100 per cent. of average earnings[3]	32.3	31.1	30.5
(e) Below 50 per cent. of average earnings[3]	5.1	4.9	4.8
Distribution of earnings for each band[4]			
(a) More than 200 per cent. of average earnings[3]	18.6	19.6	20.3
(b) Between 150 per cent. and 200 per cent. of average earnings[3]	16.3	16.9	16.8
(c) Between 100 per cent. and 150 per cent. of average earnings[3]	30.6	29.6	28.9
(d) Between 50 per cent. and 100 per cent. of average earnings[3]	28.3	27.5	27.5
(e) Below 50 per cent. of average earnings[3]	6.2	6.4	6.5

Notes:

[1] Source: Government Actuary's Department.

[2] Excludes contributions paid by HM forces.

[3] Average earnings of both full-time and part-time employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey period is unaffected by absence: £224.92 for 1989–90, £283.49 for 1994–95 and £294.33 for 1995–96.

[4] *Source:* Office for National Statistics.

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the revenue consequences of abolishing the upper limit on employee national insurance contributions in Wales. [17870]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

If the limit were removed for Great Britain, it is estimated that the employees affected would pay an extra £3.3 billion[1] in contributions in a full year.

Note:

[1] Assumes that the current 10 per cent. contributions rate would apply to earnings above the upper earnings limit.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohue: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has beeen the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which *(a)* and *(b)* have attended, indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16573]

Mr. Lilley: Ministers attend Scottish Grand Committee meetings as part of their normal parliamentary duties and officials do so as part of their normal departmental duties. Expenditure falling to my Department has been limited to travelling costs. I attended the Scottish Grand Committee meeting on 20 May 1996 in Dunfermline and has officials in attendance as necessary.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by what process he plans to oversee the clinical standards of service provided by contractors providing medical services for the Benefits Agency. [17620]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 19 February, *Official Report*, column *591*.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which private sector companies took part in the Benefits Agency medical services partnering project; on what basis they were chosen; and if he will place a copy of their reports in the Library. [17618]

Mr. Burt: The private sector companies which took part in the partnering project were BMI, Capita and Serco. Seventeen companies responded to an advertisement in the national press and were sent a questionnaire which was designed to identify specific strengths and formed the basis of a formal sift. Particular emphasis was placed upon practical experience, commitment to quality and customer service.

The companies reports are commercial in confidence and will not be placed in the Library. To do so would prejudice the effective conduct of commercial activities.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information has been *(a)* requested and *(b)* obtained by his Department from each of the private companies contracting to provide medical services to the Benefits Agency concerning (i) safeguarding the records of benefit claimants and (ii) the broad business objectives of the contractors. [17616]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 25 February, *Official Report*, columns *203–4*.

The broad business objectives of the successful contractor(s) in relation to the delivery of a medical service to the Department must conform to the objectives of the Benefits Agency. The shortlisted companies have provided copies of policy statements relating to specific areas of the business to be contracted out.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to start an evaluation of the performance of contractors providing medical services to the Benefits Agency; and by what methods this evaluation will be carried out. [17619]

Mr. Burt: The formal contract management procedure to evaluate performance will be in place at the time of the handover of the business to the successful contractor(s). The procedure is currently in the process of development.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what net savings he expects to accrue from the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical service. [17615]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) on 7 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *681*.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to begin the process of system audits and computer audits in each site used by contractors providing medical services to the Benefits Agency; and at what intervals he plans to repeat these audits. [17617]

Mr. Burt: Audits of the IT systems will commence when the medical service is handed over to the successful contractor(s). The procedure is currently in the process of development.

Pensioners

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of *(a)* pensioners and *(b)* pensioners aged over 80 years had access to a (i) freezer, (ii) fridge, (iii) telephone, (iv) car, (v) washing machine, (vi) television, (vii) video and (viii) central heating in (1) 1979 and (2) the latest year for which figures are available. [17483]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the tables:

Percentages

	All pensioners		*Pensioners aged over 80*	
Type of durable goods	*1979*	*1993–94*	*1979*	*1993–94*
Freezer or fridge freezer	32	81	20	68
Fridge or fridge freezer	88	99	79	98
Telephone	57	94	50	92
Car/Van	34	53	18	31
Washing machine	64	83	46	66
Video	n/a	51	n/a	26
Central heating	46	81	43	76

Access to a Television

(percentages)

	All pensioners		*Pensioners aged over 80*	
Type of durable goods	*1979*	*1991–92*	*1979*	*1991–92*
Television	96	99	92	98

1. Information in the tables is derived from the households below average income datasets, which is based on information from the family expenditure survey. The latest available estimates, for 1993–94, are for two financial years data combined. Figures for 1991–92 are for two calendar years combined.
2. From 1993 onwards, information on access to televisions has not been collected in the family expenditure survey, as reported access to televisions had reached almost 100 per cent. The latest figures for access to televisions are therefore for 1991–92.
3. For HBAI analyses of the possession of consumer durables, it is assumed that members of the same household share common facilities. The percentages given in the reply represent the proportion of individuals in pensioner benefit units with access to each of the specified consumer durables within their household.
4. In HBAI, a single pensioner benefit unit is defined as a single adult of state pension age or above (65 for men, 60 for women). A pensioner couple benefit unit is one in which the man of the benefit unit is aged 65 or over. For the purpose of the over 80 years analysis, the same definition applies, except the age threshold is over 80.
5. Information on access to video recorders was not reported in the 1979 family expenditure survey.
6. All estimates are subject to sampling error.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many complaints have been made by claimants about their medical examinations in connection with incapacity benefit in the Yorkshire and Humberside region since April 1995. [16047]

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Gunnell, dated 26 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about how many complaints have been made by claimants about their medical examinations in connection with Incapacity Benefit in the Yorkshire and Humberside region since April 1995.

The information is not available in the format requested. Statistics are kept for each Medical Services Centre (MSC). Yorkshire and Humberside is dealt with by Leeds MSC. The Leeds MSC covers the Yorkshire Area Directorate and South Humberside District, part of Mercia Area Directorate. Statistics on complaints have only been kept by MSCs since September 1995 and are not broken down by Benefits Agency districts.

From September 1995 to December 1996 the Leeds MSC received 285 complaints, during which time it dealt with 111,164 examinations. These figures are provisional and subject to change.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many times has *(a)* a warning been issued, *(b)* disciplinary action been taken and *(c)* dismissal occurred (i) as a result of claimants' complaints and (ii) otherwise since the incapacity benefit was introduced. [16048]

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Gunnell, dated 26 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about how many times has (a) a warning been issued, (b) disciplinary action been taken and (c) dismissal occurred (i) as a result of claimants' complaints and (ii) otherwise since the Incapacity Benefit (IB) was introduced.

I have assumed your question refers to doctors involved in providing medical advice in connection with IB. The information is in the attached table.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Benefits agency medical services doctors subject to disciplinary action April 1995 to date

	As a result of customer complaints	*Other*
Warnings issued	1	3
Other disciplinary action	0	1
Dismissal	1	1

Figures are provisional and subject to change. This excludes contracted self-employed, fee paid doctors for whom no formal disciplinary procedures exist.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what criteria are used by the Benefits Agency in determining whether a claimant has deliberately disposed of income or capital in order to qualify for income-based jobseeker's allowance. [17943]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is contained in the jobseeker's allowance and income support adjudication officer's guide, part 33 paragraphs 33570–33589 and part 34 paragraphs 34805–34846. A copy of the guide is available in the Library.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what national insurance contribution conditions carers have to meet in order to qualify for contribution-based jobseeker's allowance. [17942]

Mr. Evans: Under jobseeker's allowance, the national insurance contribution conditions for carers are the same as for other jobseekers. As with the previous unemployment benefit scheme, entitlement to the contribution-based element of jobseeker's allowance is based on the individual's national insurance contributions in the last two full tax years before the year of the claim to jobseeker's allowance.

There are two contribution conditions. The first condition which a person must satisfy is to have paid class 1 contributions of 25 times the lower earnings limit—currently £61—in one of the two relevant tax years. The second condition is that class 1 contributions must have been paid or credited of at least 50 times the lower earnings limit—currently £61—in both the two relevant tax years on which the claim is based. The relevant tax years are the last two complete tax years before the benefit year—starting in January—in which the claim is made.

However, the linking provisions have been amended under jobseeker's allowance to provide extra help for carers. For the first time, periods in receipt of invalid care allowance are included in the jobseeker's allowance linking provisions. This ensures that a person's benefit position at the end of a period of invalid care allowance will be the same as when it started. Therefore, if a person's contribution record immediately prior to a period in receipt of invalid care allowance is sufficient to qualify the individual for contribution-based jobseeker's allowance, that record will apply to any claim for jobseeker's allowance which is made when invalid care allowance ceases.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Albania

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what official gifts his Department received from the Albanian President; [16407]

(2) what official gifts he has received from the Albanian President. [16404]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Gifts received by Ministers in their official capacity are dealt with in accordance with the procedures set out in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". The details are not made public.

European Summit (Cardiff)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements he has made with the Cardiff county council for the funding of refurbishment and conversion work at the city hall for the European summit conference in June 1998. [17916]

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Hong Kong

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many children in British independent schools are being paid for by the Hong Kong Government; and what is the average payment per child; [17941]

(2) what assessment he has made of the suitability of the Quantock school, Somerset, to receive money from the Hong Kong Government; and if parents who are employees of the Hong Kong Government with children at that school have been provided with the recent Office for Standards in Education report; [17940]

(3) what checks are made by the Hong Kong Government on the suitability of independent schools in Britain before payment is made. [17930]

Mr. Hanley: Policy on the payment of education fees for the children of employees of the Hong Kong Government is a matter for the Hong Kong Government.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if in his recent official visit to Hong Kong he had meetings concerning party finances; and if he will make a statement. [17825]

Mr. Rifkind: I attended a meeting of Conservatives Abroad in Hong Kong on Sunday 16 February. This was not a fund-raising event.

Political events may be included in Ministers' official programmes overseas, so long as no additional costs are incurred. There were no additional costs involved in this case and no Foreign Office official accompanied me to the reception.

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision will be taken on the application made to the United Kingdom post in

Islamabad by Mrs. Rukhsana Kausar (Ref: HO A525156; IMM/C4652) to join her husband in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [17902]

Dr. Liam Fox: I have asked the high commission at Islamabad for details and will have a substantive reply sent to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

European Council

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for March and *(b)* major EU events for the next six months. [17959]

Mr. David Davis: *Monthly Forecast of business for March 1997*

The following Councils are scheduled:

March 1–2: Development Aid Council (Informal)

March 2–3: Education Council (Informal)

March 3–4: Environment Council

March 6: Telecommunications Council

March 10: Internal Market Council

March 11–12: Transport Council

March 14–15: Social Affairs Council (Informal)

March 17: Ecofin Council

March 17–18 Agriculture Council

March 24–25: General Affairs Council.

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

March 1–2: Development aid council (informal)

There is no formal agenda.

March 2–3: Education council (informal)

There is no formal agenda.

March 3–4: Environment council

Adoption of the agenda.

Approval of the list of "A" items.

Community Strategy on Climate Change: Council Conclusions.

Commission Communication: Implementing Community Environmental Law: Policy Debate.

Proposal for a Council Decision concerning the signing and conclusion of an International Agreement between the European Community, Canada and the Russian Federation on Humane Trapping Standards: Progress report on negotiations with Third Countries.

Amended proposal for a Council decision on a Community action programme promoting non-governmental organisations primarily active in the field of environmental protection—legal basis proposed by the Commission: article 130S(1)): common position.

Future strategy for the control of atmospheric emissions from road transport taking into account the results from the auto/oil programme:

Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council relating to the quality of petrol and diesel fuels and amending Council Directive 93/12/EEC;

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council relating to measures to be taken against air pollution by emissions from motor vehicles and amending Council Directives 70/156/EEC and 70/220/EEC;

Second auto/oil programme: policy debate.

Proposal for a Council directive on the reduction of emissions of organic compounds due to the use of organic solvents in certain industrial activities: policy debate.

Presentation by the Commission: possible items.

Proposal for a directive on energy taxes;

Proposal for a framework directive on water.

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on environmental agreements: policy debate.

Other Business:

Commission communication on environmental taxes and charges in the single market: presentation by the Commission;

Proposal for a directive on landfill: presentation by the Commission (possible item);

Report on the workshop for the preparation of the informal ministerial meeting on small and medium-sized undertakings and the environment: Presidency statement;

Re-examination of directive 90/220/EEC on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms: statement by the Austrian delegation;

Taxation of energy and in particular kerosene: Statement by the Austrian delegation;

Situation regarding the European agreement on CO2 emissions from cars: French delegation request for information from the Commission;

First European Conference on the sustainable development of the islands (Menorca, 23 to 26 April 1997): information from the Spanish delegation.

March 6: Telecommunications Council

Adoption of the provisional agenda.

Adoption of the list of "A" points (possible item).

Proposal for a European Parliament and Council directive on the application of open network provision (ONP) to voice telephony and on universal service for telecommunications in a competitive environment (replacing European Parliament and Council Directive 95/62/EC): common position (legal basis proposed by the Commission: article 100A).

Ongoing Co-decision procedures with the European Parliament interconnection directive, TENS Telecoms, licensing directive, satellite S-PCS decision.

Action plan from the Commission on satellite communications: presentation by the Commission (with reference to action plan on space).

UMTS (next generation of mobile communications): report by the Commission.

Other business:

WTO negotiations: report by the Commission;

Implementation of telecoms directives.

March 10: Internal Market Council

PARNUTS (Foodstuffs for particular nutritional uses).

Miscellaneous additives (possible item).

March 11–12: Transport Council

Proposed amendment to directive 92/14 on phase-out of noisy aircraft: for political agreement on common position.

Aviation fuel duty: debate on resolution calling for Commission study on effects of imposition.

Proposal for mandate for Commission to negotiate Community membership of European Aviation Safety Authority: for debate.

Proposal for mandate for Commission to negotiate Community membership of EUROCONTROL: debate.

Proposed amendment to regulation 3821/85 to allow for new digital tachograph: common position.

Interoperability of road pricing technology: adoption of resolution.

Proposed regulation on pilot actions for combined transport for political agreement on common position.

Proposed directive on heavy goods vehicle charging and taxes: debate.

Proposed eighth directive on summer time: for common position.

Negotiations with Switzerland: debate.

Other Business:

Report on transport research and development.

Report on the work of the high-level group on public private partnerships/TENS.

March 14/15: Social Affairs Council (informal)

There is no formal agenda.

March 17: Ecofin Council

Preparation of stage III of EMU.

Convergency programme of France.

Convergence programme of Germany.

Annual report of the Court of Auditors and budget discharge

Taxation of energy products.

Solvency ratio direct for credit institutions (mortgages) (possible item).

March 17–18: Agriculture Council

Beef labelling/cattle identification.

Olive oil (possible item).

Arable penalties (possible item).

Agriculture price fixing (possible item).

Veterinary and phytosanitary equivalence agreements.

Structured dialogue with central and eastern European countries.

Fruit grubbing-up scheme (possible item).

Honey (possible item).

Agrimoney compensation for appreciable revaluation's (possible item).

March 24–25: General Affairs Council

First draft agenda—likely to change.

Former Yugoslavia.

Albania.

Middle East peace process.

Relations with Turkey.

Pakistan.

Commercial questions: conclusion of an agreement on information technology.

Relations with South Africa.

Preparation of the 23rd ACP-EC Council of Ministers (24–25 April 1997).

Relations with Australia.

Mediterranean policy.

European observatory on racism and xenophobia.

Transatlantic relations.

Russia.

Baltic states: European agreement.

VIIth ministerial meeting between the EU and the Rio group.

This calendar is primarily concerned with European Union matters, but certain other relevant events are also included. Events and dates quoted are based on the information available on the date of issue.

European Calendar: March to August 1997

Dates	*Location*	*Event*
1–2	Amsterdam	Development Aid Council (informal)
2–3	Amsterdam	Education Council (informal)
3–4	Brussels	Environment Council
6	Brussels	Telecommunications Council
10	Brussels	Internal Market Council
10–14	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
11–12	Brussels	Transport Council
13	Brussels	Political Committee
14–15	Rotterdam	Social Affairs Council (informal)
15–16	Apeldoorn	Gymnich (informal)
17	Brussels	Ecofin Council
17–18	Brussels	Agriculture Council
24–25	Brussels	General Affairs Council (and IGC Ministerial)
April 1997		
4—6	Noordwijk	Ecofin Council (Informal)
6–8	Maastricht	Informal meeting of Cultural Affairs Ministers
7–10	Strasbourg	European Parliament plenary
9–11	The Hague	Ministerial conference on social integration
10	Brussels	Political Committee
10	Luxembourg	Consumer Council
14–15	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
17	Luxembourg	Social Affairs Council
18–19	Maastricht	Post–Lomé ministerial meeting
18–20	Amsterdam	Environment Council (informal)
20–22*	Warsaw	Meeting of EU and PHARE—Country Education Ministers
21–22	The Netherlands	Political Committee
21–22	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
23	Brussels	European Parliament plenary
24	Luxembourg	Industry Council
24–25	Luxembourg	ACP/EU ministerial conference
24–25	The Hague	International Conference on Innovative Research, and Appropriate health care for the people of Europe
24–26	The Hague	Ministerial conference on trafficking in women
25	Brussels	European Parliament plenary
29–30	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council (and IGC ministerial)
May 1997		
6–7	Strasbourg	Council of Europe ministerial
12	Brussels	Ecofin Council
12–13	Brussels	Agriculture Council
12–13	Paris	WEU ministerial
12–16	Strasbourg	European Parliament plenary
14–15	Brussels	Research Council
15	Brussels	Political Committee
20	Brussels	Internal Market Council
22	Brussels	Political Committee
25–27	Domburg	Agriculture Council (informal)
26	Brussels	Energy Council
27–28	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
28–29	Brussels	European Parliamentary plenary
29	Brussels	Telecommunications Council
June 1997		
2–3	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council (and IGC ministerial)
5	Luxembourg	Health Council
5	Luxembourg	Development Council
5–6	The Hague	K4 Committee
9	Luxembourg	Ecofin Council
9–10	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
9–13	Strasbourg	European Parliament plenary
10	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council (tbc)
12	Luxembourg	Social Affairs Council

European Calendar: March to August 1997

Dates	*Location*	*Event*
16–17	Amsterdam	European Council
17–18	Luxembourg	Transport Council
19	Brussels	Political Committee
20–22	Denver	G7
23	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
23	Luxembourg	Ecofin Council (tbc)
23–24	Luxembourg	Environment Council
25–26	Brussels	European Parliament plenary
26	Luxembourg	Education Council
26	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
30	Luxembourg	Culture Council
July 1997		
1		Luxembourg Presidency begins
7	Brussels	Ecofin Council
10–11	Luxembourg	Political Committee
12–13	Luxembourg	Labour and Social Affairs Council (informal)
14–18	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
21–22	Brussels	Agriculture Council
22–23	Brussels	General Affairs Council
24	Brussels	Budget Council
August 1997		
There are no events scheduled for August.		

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Personal Injury Actions

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Attorney-General how many representations he has received since 1993 urging the amendment of the Limitation Act 1980 so far as it relates to time limits for actions in respect of personal injuries; what proportion of these refer to allegations of sexual abuse of the complainant or litigant when the latter was a child; and if he will make a statement. [16990]

Mr. Streeter: I have been asked to reply.

Since 1993, my Department has received about 10 inquiries, including questions asked by hon. Members, about possible reform of the law of limitation as it applies to personal injury cases. These have related to the limitation period applicable when there is an allegation that an adult's illness is the result of intentional harm he suffered many years before. In 1995, the Law Commission undertook a comprehensive review of the law of limitation period s with a view to its simplification and rationalisation, and the commission expects to publish a consultation paper this summer.

Stubbing and Others *v.* the United Kingdom

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Attorney-General what *(a)* representations he has received on and *(b)* assessment he has made of the (i) dissenting and (ii) partly dissenting opinions of judges in the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Stubbing and others *v.* the United Kingdom. [16991]

Mr. Streeter: I have been asked to reply.

My Department has received no representations on any of the opinions expressed by the court in Stubbings and others *v.* United Kingdom. My Department has studied all the opinions closely, as has the Law Commission, which expects to publish a consultation paper on the law of limitation this summer.

PRIME MINISTER

Letters to Shareholders

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what was the source of the information on shareholder identities which he used to send his letter of 28 January to shareholders in privatised companies; [17954]

(2) under what statutory provisions he obtained the information on shareholder identities which he used to send letters to shareholders of privatised companies; and if he will make a statement. [17955]

The Prime Minister: The Government were not involved in obtaining the information which came from published sources.

Engagements

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 February. [16553]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 February. [16638]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 February. [16639]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16794]

The Prime Minister: A list of the total number of oral and written parliamentary questions answered by Government Departments in the Sessions 1982–83 to 1995–96, as supplied by the parliamentary on-line information service unit, has been placed in the Library of the House.

Figures for 1979–80 to 1981–82 are not available. My Office estimates that over the past year approximately 1 per cent. of the total number of parliamentary questions were not answered because of disproportionate costs or because the information requested was not held centrally.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animal Feed

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what dates action was taken to ban the feeding of ruminant remains to ruminant animals *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in other European Union countries and *(c)* in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. [17661]

Mrs. Browning: The feeding of ruminant protein to ruminants was prohibited in Great Britain in 1988 and in Northern Ireland in 1989. Community decision 94/381 of 27 June 1994 required all member states to ban the feeding of mammalian protein to ruminants. In member states with a system which makes it possible to distinguish between protein from ruminant and non-ruminant species—such as Denmark—the ban is limited to the feeding of ruminant proteins to ruminants. We do not have detailed information on legislation in place in all of the member states but are aware that Ireland introduced a ban on feeding mammalian protein to ruminants on 13 August 1990, that is, before Community decision 94/381. We do not have information on the controls introduced by all OECD members. However, we do know that Switzerland prohibited the feeding of ruminant protein to ruminants in December 1990. Canada is proposing to introduce a ban on feeding mammalian proteins to mammals, and the USA is proposing a ban on feeding ruminant proteins to ruminants.

Salmon

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with the Irish authorities about the action the Irish Government are taking to secure the escape of early-running salmon. [17516]

Mr. Baldry: There have been no recent discussions with the Irish authorities on this issue.

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16186]

Mr. Boswell: From information held centrally, the answers to the questions are as follows:

	1994	*1995*	*1996*
(a)	Manpower[1]	Manpower[1]	Manpower[1]
	Reed Employment	Kelly Services	Kelly Services
	Anne Pettengell	Adecco (formerly	Adecco (formerly
	CBR Group	ECCO	ECCO
	Country Bureau	Employment)	Employment)
	Hays Accountancy	Reed Employment	Reed Employment
	Anne Pettengell	Hays Accountancy	Hays Accountancy
	Pertemps	Anne Pettengell	Back-up
	Labstaff	Pertemps	Baxter
	Office Angels	Baxter	Office Angels
	Three Tees	Office Angels	Labstaff
		Labstaff	Plum Personnel
		Accountancy	Northern
		Personnel	Recruitment
(b)	362	689	995
(c)	£530,801	£845,564	£2,414,067[2]
(d)	4 weeks	6 weeks	6 weeks[3]

Notes:

[1] A number of recruitment agencies have been used over the last three years. Those listed are the ones with significant expenditure. Some local agencies are used by MAFF and agency offices to recruit a small number of staff at different locations, making it impossible to extract the required information without disproportionate cost.

[2] It is not possible to show the median cost paid to each agency per person recruited as to do so would have involved disproportionate cost.

[3] The overall average length of contract shows an average of averages. Requirements across MAFF and its agencies vary. It is therefore impossible to identify any particular period of contract as being representative of the needs of MAFF and its agencies as a whole.

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17074]

Mr. Boswell: The table details the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from MAFF and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately.

	MAFF	*ADAS*	*CSL*	*VLA*	*VMD*	*PSD*	*MHS*
IT equipment							
Number of items	37	Figures not available	nil	22	nil	nil	3
Cost of items (£)	35,000.00	—	—	Amount not available	—	—	759.00
Other equipment							
Number of items	7	—	nil	—	nil	nil	nil
Cost of items (£)	8,680.31	—	—	—	—	—	—
Items over £5,000							
Ford Transit	5,500.00	—	—	—	—	—	—

North-east Drift Net Fishery

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of the Environment Agency about the opening date of the north-east drift net fishery. [17399]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 26 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *137*. I have not had any more recent discussion with the chairman of the Environment Agency about the opening date of this fishery.

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department first received a report proposing a delay in the opening of the north-east salmon drift net fishery; and if he will make a statement. [17517]

Mr. Baldry: There have been a number of proposals to delay the opening date of his fishery. The report on salmon net fisheries presented to Parliament by the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Secretary of State for Scotland in October 1991 invited the National Rivers Authority to consider delaying the opening date until 1 May so as to reduce the level of exploitation of spring-running salmon. The NRA decided not to implement this proposal on the ground that any action on spring salmon needed to be part of a wider programme embracing rod and net fisheries in England and Scotland. In June 1995, the then Minister asked the NRA to reconsider its decision, in the light of the Salmon Advisory Committee's report, "Run Timing of Salmon", which recommended that consideration be given to protection of early-running fish, including additional control of exploitation in both commercial and sport fisheries. The Environment Agency, the successor to the NRA, is still considering this request.

Earlier this month, the task force set up by the Secretary of State for Scotland to produce a management strategy for Scottish salmon fisheries recommended that the opening date for the north-east coast drift net fishery be postponed until 1 June. The Government have issued the task force's report for consultation, and will consider this recommendation together with the task force's other recommendations.

Veterinary Service

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many vets were employed by the State Veterinary Service in each year from 1979 to the present. [17629]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The number of veterinary surgeons employed by the State Veterinary Service at 1 January each year since 1980 is detailed in the table. Since 1980, the structure of the State Veterinary Service has changed several times. The Central Veterinary Laboratory, which previously formed part of the State Veterinary Service, became the Veterinary Laboratories Agency in April 1990. The CVL figures are incorporated in this return for the years 1 January 1980 to 1 January 1990. From 1 June 1990 the figures do not include the CVL. The Veterinary Investigation Service became part of the VLA on 1 October 1995 and is not included in these figures from that date.

Year	*Number of vets*
1980	580.5
1981	563.5
1982	557.0
1983	549.0
1984	539.5
1985	527.5
1986	506.5
1987	464.5
1988	444.5
1989	422.0
1990	430.5
1991	408.0
1992	414.5
1993	420.0
1994	408.3
1995	394.5
1996	301.2
1997	289.5

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many veterinary investigation centres are currently operating; what plans there are to develop these centres; how many there were in each year from 1979–80; and if he will make a statement. [17630]

Mr. Hogg: I have asked the chief executive of the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Dr. T. W. A. Little, to reply on my behalf.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Dr. Gavin Strang, dated 27 February 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on Veterinary Investigation (VI) Centres.

Since October 1995 the VI Centres have been part of the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA). There are fourteen Centres and they play a vital role in fulfilling VLA's surveillance responsibilities for MAFF.

You asked how many Centres there were in each year from 1979 to the present, this is set out below:

Year	*Number of VI centres*
1979 to 1985	24
1986 to 1990	19
1991	16
1992	15
1993	14

Research and Development

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many persons are employed in his Department's research and development programme; and how many there were in each year from 1979–80. [17631]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Some figures have been published in the statistical supplement to the "Forward Look"—"Science, Engineering and Technology Statistics 1996,

issued as a separate document in May 1996"—reflecting the position since 1984–85. The entry for MAFF was as follows:

Total personnel engaged on R&D within MAFF (full-time equivalents)[1]

Year	*Number*
1984–85	2,264
1985–86	2,062
1986–87	1,924
1987–88	1,919
1988–89[2]	2,201
1989–90	1,801
1990–91[3]	2,514
1991–92	2,420
1992–93	2,512
1993–94	2,529
1994–95	2,497

[1] This table refers to personnel engaged in R&D, according to the Frascati definition. Figures for personnel quoted in the departmental reports may include those engaged in other forms of science and technology.
[2] Staff at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, included form 1998–99.
[3] Staff at non-departmental public bodies included from 1990–91.

These figures cover, in the main, staff directly involved in research at the Ministry's agencies, plus Horticulture Research International and Kew. However, the Department does not keep statistical information on the large numbers of headquarters staff involved in the development of research to meet policy needs and its commissioning, monitoring and evaluation. Nor has it figures for the numbers of personnel working for external contractors who carry out MAFF-funded research. This latter group includes public sector research establishments—such as the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and Natural Environment Research Council research institutes—universities and other private contractors.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his Department's total research and development expenditure was in each year from 1979 to the present in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices. [17632]

Mr. Hogg: My Department's total research and development expenditure for each year from 1981–82 in cash and constant prices is set out in the following table.

£ million

Year	*Cash*	*Constant prices*[1]
1981–82	106.8	211.2
1982–83	113.9	210.2
1983–84	118.6	209.2
1984–85	119.4	200.5
1985–86	118.4	188.5
1986–87	118.3	182.8
1987–88	113.8	167.0
1988–89	115.0	158.2
1989–90	112.2	144.2
1990–91	119.1	141.8
1991–92	121.5	135.9
1992–93	132.9	142.7
1993–94	135.0	140.9
1994–95	137.2	140.7
1995–96	139.7	139.7
1996–97[2]	137.6	134.2

[1] Using the GDP deflator (1995–96 = 100).
[2] Provisional.
Figures for 1979–80 and 1980–81 are not available.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many commissions his Department placed with the Agriculture and Food Research Council and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council in each year from 1979 to the present; how many such commissions he expects to place this year; and what was the value of those commissions in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices. [17656]

Mr. Hogg: My Department issued a single commission each year up to 1994–95 for its R and D requirements from the institutes of the Agriculture and Food Research Council and its successor, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. In 1995–96, the commission was replaced with umbrella contracts with each of the BBSRC institutes. Details of the total amounts spent in cash and constant prices are set out. In addition to funding through the commissions and umbrella contracts, MAFF has funded research with the BBSRC institutes through separate contracts, the majority of which have been let by competition since 1994–95.

£ million

Year	*Cash*	*Constant Prices*[1]
1979–80	30.4	78.0
1980–81	37.4	81.1
1981–82	44.3	87.6
1982–83	48.6	89.7
1983–84	51.3	90.5
1984–85	52.8	88.7
1985–86	51.8	82.5
1986–87	47.9	74.0
1987–88	44.2	64.9
1988–89	46.4	63.8
1989–90	46.0	59.1
1990–91	45.6	54.3
1991–92	34.5	38.6
1992–93	34.8	37.4
1993–94	36.0	37.6
1994–95	34.6	35.5
1995–96	34.7	34.7
1996–97[2]	29.3	28.6

[1] Using the GDP deflator (1995–96 = 100).
[2] Provisional.

Quarantine

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his plans for a green paper on quarantine. [17818]

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish details of his review of the current quarantine regulations. [17832]

Mrs. Browning: The Government's review of the current quarantine regulations is continuing, and further analysis is needed before it can be finalised.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *660*, on quarantine premises (1) if he will list the four premises which have indicated that they do not wish to comply with the voluntary code of practice at this stage; [17842]

(2) if he will list the premises inspected by the State Veterinary Service, indicating which have complied with the standards required for the voluntary code of practice. [17843]

Mrs. Browning: As soon as the programme of inspections has been completed a list of premises complying with the code will be included in the literature sent by Agriculture Departments to prospective clients of quarantine premises. I will place a copy of the literature in the Library of the House.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *660*, if he will list the ports and airports which have facilities for holding animals prior to them being taken into quarantine. [17844]

Mrs. Browning: Animals may be landed only at the following ports and airports prior to their being taken into quarantine:

Ports

Dover Eastern Docks

Harwich, Parkeston Quay

Hull

Portsmouth

Southampton.

Airports

Birmingham

Edinburgh

Gatwick

Glasgow

Heathrow

Leeds

Manchester

Prestwick

Belfast.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy as regards the export of live farm animals for slaughter or further fattening in non-EU member states whose welfare standards do not match Community standards; and if he will make a statement. [17827]

Mrs. Browning: We have a long-standing policy of permitting the export of animals for further fattening, or slaughter only to those countries with standards at least equivalent to those in force within the European Union on the protection of animals during transport and at slaughter.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the outbreaks of sheep scab in each month from 1993 to date. [17813]

Mrs. Browning: Official recording of the number of outbreaks of sheep scab was discontinued after deregulation of compulsory controls in 1992.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what progress he has made towards implementing compulsory treatment for sheep scab; and if he will make a statement; [17814]

(2) if he will make sheep scab a notifiable disease. [17815]

Mrs. Browning: The public consultation on draft legislation to introduce new measures to deal with sheep scab ended on 7 February 1997 and the comments received are now being considered. The proposed new measures would enable local authorities to deal with sheep scab on common or open grazing and will introduce criminal offences for failing to treat animals affected with sheep scab and for moving affected animals.

The proposals do not include a re-introduction of compulsory national treatment.

Sheep scab remains within the meaning of "disease" in section 88 of the Animal Health Act 1981 and is therefore still technically notifiable to a police constable. However, our proposals do not include making sheep scab notifiable to the Ministry or local authorities.

Parasiticides

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent research he has commissioned into parasiticides. [17816]

Mrs. Browning: The focus of research commissioned into parasiticides in respect of animal health is on sustainable disease control and research to develop alternatives to pharmaceutical control. The main sponsor for research of this kind in relation to helminths is the Scottish Office Agriculture Environment and Fisheries Department which is currently funding the following significant programme of research on nematode parasites in livestock—mainly sheep.

£110,000: Biological properties of nematode resistance

£730,000: Host response to challenge

£210,000: Control strategies.

Full details of its research is published in its "Programme of commissioned research and development 1996–97" obtainable from SOAEFD's scientific advisor's unit at Pentland house, Edinburgh.

In addition, the Central Veterinary Laboratory has just finished a three-year project to determine the effects of counter selection on reversion to anthelmintic susceptibility. A further small project is currently being funded to validate a commercial product to enable farmers to detect anthelmintic resistance. Beginning in 1997–98, a three-year project at CVL aims to develop a means of predicting whether anthelmintic resistance is likely to appear on a farm.

A major project at Compton is investigating immunity to coccidia which should eventually facilitate the development of immunological means of control if significant resistance does develop.

To mitigate development of resistance by sheep scab mites, MAFF is also supporting research aimed at controlling sheep scab other than by pharmaceutical means. Other MAFF research relating to developing alternatives to parasiticides includes work involving livestock flies.

Surveillance on anthelmintic resistance is ongoing via MAFF's Veterinary Investigation Service.

Pigs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many piglets of less than 12 weeks of age were exported for production or breeding during 1996; [17839]

(2) if the consignment of piglets exported on 24 January on the MV Cap Afrique was accompanied by an export health certificate as worded in model 111 of the annexe to Council directive 64/432/EEC; [17838]

(3) how many pigs were exported for slaughter during 1996. [17840]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 24 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns *76–77*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Taoiseach (Meeting)

8. **Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next plans to meet the Taoiseach to discuss the political situation in Northern Ireland. [16367]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have no plans to seek a meeting.

I have frequent meetings with Mr. Spring, which I value.

Airport Tax (Effect on Tourism)

9. **Miss Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the impact on tourism in Northern Ireland of the airport tax. [16368]

Mr. Ancram: It is right to consider the impact of fare levels on tourism. Since the duty was first introduced in 1994, Northern Ireland has experienced record tourism figures.

Beef Markets

11. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress his Department has made in developing new markets for beef which was previously exported. [16370]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Since the ban on the export of beef was imposed, the Government have assisted the industry's marketing effort by setting up a red meat strategy group supporting promotions at UK and international exhibitions, making presentations on the traceability and quality of Northern Ireland beef to retailers and encouraging the development of marketing partnerships between producers, processors and retailers. The Northern Ireland Livestock and Meat Commission received £250,000 of EU money for marketing.

Long-term Unemployment

12. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the trends in long-term unemployment in Northern Ireland. [16371]

Mr. Ancram: At 9 January 1997, there were 34,441 long-term unemployed in Northern Ireland, a reduction of 8,297, or 17.8 per cent., compared with a year earlier.

Millennium Celebrations

14. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to celebrate the millennium in Northern Ireland. [16373]

Mr. Ancram: The Government's aim is to ensure that people throughout the community can be involved and participate in both local and UK-wide events. No specific plans have yet been finalised.

Security Situation

15. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the security situation in Northern Ireland. [16374]

Sir John Wheeler: The murder of Lance Bombardier Restorick and the continuing attacks on the police and Army are evidence of the continuing serious terrorist threat in Northern Ireland, principally from the Provisional IRA. Terrorism from whatever quarter will continue to meet with the undiminished determination of the security forces and the Government to root it out.

Sinn Fein

16. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received concerning admitting Sinn Fein to the peace negotiations. [16375]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: A wide range of views have been expressed, extending from never admitting Sinn Fein to admitting them at once.

Electoral Registers

17. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the integrity of the process of compiling electoral registers in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [16376]

Mr. Ancram: Reassessment of the methods used to effect accuracy is a constant feature of compiling the Northern Ireland electoral register. Uniquely in the UK, Northern Ireland's registration process is not dependent upon a postal return, as all registration forms are collected personally by canvassers. In addition, the Northern Ireland registration form, in contrast to the rest of the UK, seeks previous addresses to enable entries on the register to be cross checked. Also, over the past three years, the chief electoral officer has developed a computerised absent vote register to identify possible abuses of the system.

Cross-border Co-operation

18. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the adequacy of cross-border co-operation on security issues. [16377]

Sir John Wheeler: Security co-operation is regularly assessed against the increasing terrorist threat. The continuous close working relationship between the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Garda plays a vital and effective role in opposing terrorism in all its forms.

24. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects to meet a representative of the Irish security forces to discuss the fight against terrorism. [16383]

Sir John Wheeler: The Government regularly discuss security matters with the Government of the Republic of Ireland. It would be inappropriate to reveal the nature, scope and membership of such discussion, but I can assure my hon. Friend that the security forces on both sides of the border have maintained excellent co-operation and will continue to do so.

Guardsmen Fisher and Wright

19. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the oral answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, columns 498–99, when he expects to complete his consideration of the case of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright. [16378]

Sir John Wheeler: The terms of Mr. Justice Girvan's recent judgment require the cases to be looked at afresh and for new information to be obtained and taken into account. I cannot say at this stage precisely when the process will be completed. However, I can assure the hon. Member that the cases of the two guardsmen will be considered as expeditiously as possible consistent with the terms of the judgment.

Electricity Interconnector

20. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made on providing an electricity interconnector between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom mainland. [16379]

Mr. Ancram: Progress on the interconnector proposal depends on the promoters receiving planning approval. Northern Ireland Electricity plc intends to submit a second planning application in respect of the Northern Ireland element, possibly in late February or early March 1997.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has announced that he is minded to grant planning permission for the Scottish element of the project, subject to sections of the proposed overhead line being placed underground. Comments submitted by interested parties are being considered and a final decision will be made in due course.

29. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the impact of the interconnector with Scotland on the electricity needs of the Province during the next decade. [16388]

Mr. Ancram: None. This is a matter for Northern Ireland Electricity plc, a private company, which has the obligation under its licence to arrange for Northern Ireland's electricity requirements to be met economically. The company is supervised in the discharge of this responsibility by the independent Director General of Electricity Supply. I am informed that, under the terms of the agreement entered into between Northern Ireland Electricity plc and Scottish Power plc, approximately 20 per cent. of the demand on the Northern Ireland electricity system could be met by the Interconnector, when fully operational.

Peace Process

21. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest situation in respect of the peace process. [16380]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Members for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), and for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan).

Paramilitary Violence

22. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his policies to reduce levels of paramilitary violence in the Province. [16381]

Sir John Wheeler: The Government's first priority in Northern Ireland is to eradicate terrorism from whichever section of the community it comes. To this end, the Government will continue to ensure that the Royal Ulster Constabulary, supported by the armed forces, has both the resources and the legal powers it needs to combat terrorism effectively. Already this year, the security forces have achieved a number of significant successes, with 22 people being charged with terrorist-related offences and significant terrorist activity disrupted.

Terrorist Suspects (Recording of Interviews)

23. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce the audio recording of interviews with terrorist suspects; and if he will make a statement. [16382]

Sir John Wheeler: The Government believe, taking into account the views of the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, that a move to audio recording at this time would not necessarily be in the overall interests of justice. The special circumstances in Northern Ireland mean that, for the time being, audio recording would be unacceptable on security grounds. Indeed, it its entirely possible that people's lives would be put at risk if the contents of recorded interview were made public in a court.

However, the Government do see benefits, both for interviewees and for the police, in facilitating silent video recording of interviews. A public consultation exercise on the draft code of practice to which the new system will operate has been completed, and it is hoped that the scheme will be up and running later this year.

Local Authority Powers

25. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met representatives of local government in Northern Ireland to discuss extending powers to local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [16384]

Mr. Ancram: I and my ministerial colleagues have frequent discussions with district councillors on a range of subjects. These have included the powers of local authorities. The Government continue to keep the arrangements for local government under review. At present, we see no case for extending powers to local authorities. To act now would be to pre-empt the outcome

of the multi-party negotiations, strand one of which will consider the issue of local administration in Northern Ireland.

Parades Commission

26. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what responses he has received to his consultation on the adjudicatory functions of a parades commission as recommended in the North report. [16385]

Sir John Wheeler: We have received a number of written submissions and meetings are being set up as part of the consultation exercise announced in my right hon. and learned Friend's statement of 30 January.

Sectarian Intimidation

27. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received regarding sectarian intimidation. [16386]

Sir John Wheeler: My right hon. and learned Friend and other Ministers have received representations from, and had a number of meetings with, local church leaders, Members of Parliament and councillors on the subject of sectarian intimidation across Northern Ireland.

Rating and Valuation

28. **Sir James Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will review arrangements for valuation and rating in Northern Ireland. [16387]

Sir John Wheeler: A non-domestic revaluation has recently been carried out in Northern Ireland and a new valuation list will come into effect on 1 April 1997. A review of rating and valuation matters is planned for the new financial year.

Action for Community Employment

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the reduction in the number of ACE posts in 1995–96 and 1996–97 to date. [16369]

Mr. Ancram: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) earlier today.

Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pages of legislation have been *(a)* passed and *(b)* repealed in each of the last three years. [16372]

Sir John Wheeler: As regards Acts of Parliament extending exclusively to Northern Ireland, there were no such Acts in 1994, in 1995 there were eight pages enacted and none repealed and in 1996 there were 66 pages enacted and 100 repealed. As regards orders in council in 1994 300 pages were enacted and 53 repealed; in 1995 1,145 pages were enacted and 463 repealed; and in 1996 1,199 pages were enacted and 951 repealed.

North Report

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress he has made in implementing the recommendations of the North report. [16361]

Sir John Wheeler: The Government accepted a number of the report's recommendations immediately, including the need for an independent commission. The report's recommendation that the commission should have an adjudicatory function is currently the subject of public consultation. A draft order was published for public consultation on Tuesday to make amendments to the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. We hope to announce the names of members of the commission shortly. Work is proceeding on a code of conduct.

Electoral Count (Objections)

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many objections were lodged with the electoral court in each calendar year from 1980 to 1996; and how many of the objectives were upheld. [16468]

Mr. Ancram: The statistics required by the hon. Gentleman are not kept in the precise form he has requested. The table provided gives the most detailed information available and covers the whole period for which records have been kept. Claims and objections are determined at electoral hearings, not courts, and the statistics are compiled on the basis of the registration cycle and not a calendar year. All the information reproduced is obtainable from the annual reports of the chief electoral officer, which are available in the Library of the House.

The objections referred to in the table are those lodged to names included in the draft register of electors, which is published in November each year.

Northern Ireland electoral register claims and objections

Register year	*Received*		*Allowed*		*Additions to register*
	Claims	*Objections*	*Claims*	*Objections*	
1974	5,928	5,851			
1975	9,378	9,334			
1976	5,441	5,105			
1977	5,361	5,495			
1978	6,494	4,177			
1979	5,814	2,632			
1980	6,108	3,322			
1981	5,504	2,959			
1982	5,076	2,642			
1983	7,452	3,426			

Northern Ireland electoral register claims and objections

Register year	Received		Allowed		Additions to register
	Claims	Objections	Claims	Objections	
1984			5,524	1,679	
1985			4,108	1,154	
1986			4,100	846	
1987			3,730	785	
1988			1,108	204	
1989			1,021	231	
1990			456	195	
1991	816	180	620	125	
1992	956	81	634	49	
1993	1,000	67	806	63	
1994	630	25	436	14	
1995	471	44	330	17	
1996	443	56	298	24	
1997	1,169	252	770	134	

Under continuous registration, there is also the facility for objections to be made to any claim lodged for inclusion in the published register of electors. Such objections have occurred only in 1981 when there were 22, and in 1982 when there were 60.

Prospect Downs Development

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) when road works, storm drainage and sewage disposal arrangements at the Prospect downs development, Carrickfergus, will be completed to the adoption standard of the Department of the Environment. [17048]

(2) what action has been taken by the Department of the environment to persuade the site developer at Prospect downs, Carrickfergus, to bring roads, storm drainage and sewerage systems up to adoption standard; [17050]

(3) if the bond held by the Department of the Environment in respect of outstanding work at Prospect downs, Carrickfergus, is sufficient to meet the cost of completion of roads, drainage and sewage disposal arrangements to the adoption standard of the Department. [17049]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. W. J. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from W. J. McCoubrey to Mr. Roy Beggs, dated 26 February 1997:

The Secretary of State had asked me to respond to your 3 recent PQs about the Prospect Downs development at Carrickfergus.

The Prospect Downs development consists of 20 phases. Storm drainage and sewerage disposal arrangements have been completed to adoption standards in phases 1–9 and have been adopted. The roadworks associated with phase 1 have also been adopted but problems exist in relation to the other phases. Roads Service has been in contact with the two developers involved on a number of occasions with a view to having the necessary works carried out but without success. Enforcement action is therefore under consideration in order to bring the matter to a conclusion.

With the exception of one of the phases bonds exist in relation to the outstanding work. it is not possible to say at this stage whether or not the amounts bounded would be sufficient to complete the works buy nevertheless the Department can recover any shortfall from the developers.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the approved budget of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools for 1996–97 and 1997–98; and what reductions are being required in its administrative budget. [17668]

Mr. Ancram: The total recurrent and capital budget for CMS in 1996–97 was £1.627 million. The equivalent budget for 1997–98 has still to be finalised, and I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Teachers (redundancies)

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the number of teachers in primary and secondary schools in Northern Ireland likely to be declared redundant in 1997–98 in *(a)* controlled schools and *(b)* maintained schools. [17664]

Mr. Ancram: The information sought is not available. Under the local management of schools arrangements, the number of teachers to be employed is a matter for schools' boards of governors.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Further Education Funding

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the likelihood that capital grants to further education colleges will have to be repaid to the European regional development fund, where the grant was conditional on an increase in student numbers which was to be funded through the demand-led element of further education funding. [17271]

Mr. Paice: Payments under the European regional development fund depend on project performance and delivery outputs. For projects involving the provision of training infrastructure, outputs may include vocational qualification gained or trainees trained. These outputs do not necessarily require a net increase in student numbers in all cases.

School Security (Sheffield)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funding has been allocated to Sheffield over the planning period for grants for school security measures; and if she will make a statement. [17738]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government will support extra expenditure of £66 million on school security me_sures in England over the next three years. This is in addition to spending on security from local education authorities' and schools' normal budgets. The extra funding will be allocated to authorities through the Department's grants for education support and training programme and to grant-maintained schools by the Funding Agency for Schools.

Under the 1997–98 GEST programme, the security grant for Sheffield LEA will support expenditure of £184,900. Grant allocations for future years will be decided in due course.

Vacancies (Follow-up)

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if a benefit sanction may be applied for failure to follow up the vacancy where a claimant identifies a vacancy himself and requests an in-work benefit calculation from an Employment Service adviser. [17865]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 27 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about whether a benefit sanction may be applied for failure to follow up the vacancy where a claimant identifies a vacancy himself and requests an in-work benefit calculation from an employment service adviser. This falls within my responsibility as Chief Executive of the Employment Service (ES).

Where the jobseeker identifies a vacancy themselves and discusses it with an ES adviser, it is considered to be notified to the jobseeker. Provided the jobseeker's suitability for the job has been established, if they do not apply for the job, or do not attend for the interview, or refuse the job, the case may be referred to the Sector Adjudication Officer (SAO). If the SAO decides the job, the case may be referred to the Sector Adjudication Officer (SAO). If the SAO decides the jobseeker has acted without good cause, a sanction of up to 26 weeks could be imposed.

For these, as with all vacancies notified to the jobseeker, an in-work benefit calculation can be done by an ES adviser.

I hope this is helpful.

Jobseekers (Minimum Wage)

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in what circumstances an Employment Service adviser may use an in-work benefit calculation to encourage a jobseeker to lower his minimum wage as indicated in question 16 of the ES2 form. [17864]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Robert Horne to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 27 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to reply to your question about the circumstances when an Employment Service Adviser may use an in-work benefit calculation to encourage a jobseeker to lower their minimum wage.

All Employment Service (ES) offices provide a structured and coherent advisory and information service which is aimed at helping jobseekers back into work as soon as possible.

As part of this service, our advisers provide information about in-work benefits, either at the request of the jobseeker or, where appropriate, as part of New Jobseeker Interviews and Restart Interviews. In relevant circumstances, Advisers also provide jobseekers with personal in-work benefit calculations to show how they can be better off in work, either for a particular job or for a range of wages.

The "Helping You Back To Work" (ES2) form is generally used when the jobseeker initially makes a claim for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). In discussing question 16, the adviser determines whether the jobseeker's salary expectation is realistic in the light of opportunities in the labour market. If the expected salary appears unrealistic, then the adviser will make the jobseeker aware of in-work benefits they may be able to claim if they accept a job with a lower wage.

I hope this clarifies the position.

Modern Apprentices

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each training and enterprise council *(a)* the number of modern apprentices and *(b)* the number in each occupational sector. [17919]

Mr. Paice: The information requested is given in the table.

Modern apprenticeship England and Wales—trainees in each sector as at 5 January 1997

Numbers and per cent.

	England and Wales	*Bedfordshire*	*Cambridgeshire*	*North Derbyshire*	*South Derbyshire*
Total number in training	66,700	400	400	400	1,000
Percentage in:					
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	1	—	0	—	0
Business Administration	13	6	10	27	11
Chemical Industry	1	1	0	1	—
Child Care	3	—	3	—	3
Electrical Installation Engineering	6	7	5	5	16
Engineering Manufacturing	19	43	10	17	21
Engineering Construction	1	—	—	0	—
Information Technology	1	—	3	0	1
Marine Engineering	1	1	—	—	1
Polymers Sector	—	1	—	—	—
Retailing	7	5	6	2	2
Steel Industry	—	—	—	0	0
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—
Travel Service	2	1	1	1	2
Construction	8	0	15	5	2
Plumbing	1	0	1	1	2
Wool Textiles	—	—	—	—	—
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	—	—	—	—
Accounting	2	1	0	3	5
Air Transport	—	4	16	—	0
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	—	—
Bakers	—	—	1	—	—
Builders Merchants	—	—	—	—	0
Bus and Coach	—	—	—	—	—
Carpet Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity	—	—	—	—	1
Engineering Services	—	3	—	0	—
Estate Agencies	—	0	0	—	1
Fire Services	—	—	—	—	—
Furniture Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	1
Glass	—	0	—	5	—
Hairdressing	7	8	2	9	13
Healthcare	1	—	—	—	—
Horticulture (amenity)	—	—	—	—	—
Hotel and Catering	6	—	18	4	2
Knitting and lace	—	—	—	0	1
Man-made fibres	—	—	—	—	1
Meat training	—	—	—	—	—
Paper and Board	—	—	0	—	—
Printing	1	2	1	0	1
Road Haulage	—	—	—	—	—
Seafish	—	—	—	—	—
Security	—	—	—	—	0
Sports and Recreation	1	0	2	—	—
Tell Communications	—	—	—	—	—
Timber Trade	—	—	—	0	—
Motor Industry	9	7	3	13	10
Health and Social Care	3	10	2	4	1
Newspapers	—	—	—	—	—
Operating Department Practice	—	—	—	—	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	—	—	—	—
Banking Services	—	—	—	—	—
Floristry	—	—	—	—	—
Horses	—	—	—	—	1
Insurance	—	—	—	—	0
Museums	—	—	—	—	0
Plumbing	—	—	—	1	—
Rail	—	—	—	—	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	—	—	—	—	—
Farriery	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:

1. As the information on the sector breakdown is from the MA Database, it is only possible to give percentages, not actual numbers.

2. "—" = less than 0.5 per cent.

Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Numbers and per cent.

	Leicester	*Lincolnshire*	*Norfolk and Waveney*	*Northants*	*Greater Nottinghamshire*
Total number in training	900	900	1,300	700	1,300
Percentage in:					
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	0	5	1	2	—
Business Administration	4	24	19	22	18
Chemical Industry	—	0	—	—	0
Childcare	—	3	—	—	4
Electrical Installation Engineering	6	3	15	4	13
Engineering Manufacturing	32	19	20	9	6
Engineering Construction	—	0	—	—	1
Information Technology	3	0	—	2	7
Marine Engineering	—	1	—	0	—
Polymers Sector	0	2	—	—	—
Retailing	8	6	—	6	12
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—
Travel Service	1	1	—	1	1
Construction	4	6	30	1	5
Plumbing	0	2	—	1	2
Wool Textiles	—	—	—	—	—
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	—	—	—	—
Accounting	5	4	1	10	3
Air Transport	—	—	—	—	—
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	—	—
Bakers	—	—	—	0	—
Builders Merchants	—	—	—	—	0
Bus and Coach	—	—	—	—	—
Carpet Manufacturing	—	—	—	0	—
Electricity	—	—	—	—	2
Engineering Services	—	0	—	0	0
Estate Agencies	0	1	—	0	—
Fire Services	—	0	—	—	—
Furniture Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	1
Glass	—	—	—	—	0
Hairdressing	0	7	—	7	7
Healthcare	—	1	—	0	—
Horticulture (amenity)	—	—	—	—	—
Hotel and Catering	4	3	5	8	1
Knitting and lace	1	—	—	—	—
Man-made fibres	—	—	—	—	—
Meat training	—	1	—	—	—
Paper and Board	—	—	—	—	—
Printing	5	0	2	2	2
Road Haulage	0	0	—	—	—
Seafish	—	—	—	—	—
Security	—	—	—	0	0
Sports and Recreation	—	0	2	0	—
Tell Communications	—	—	—	—	—
Timber Trade	—	—	0	0	0
Motor Industry	27	7	7	22	13
Health and Social Care	0	5	—	0	3
Newspapers	—	—	—	—	—
Operating Department Practice	—	—	—	1	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	—	—	—	—
Banking Services	—	—	—	—	—
Floristry	—	0	—	—	—
Horses	—	—	—	—	—
Insurance	—	—	—	—	0
Museums	—	—	—	—	—
Plumbing	—	—	—	—	—
Rail	—	—	—	—	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	—	—	—	—	—
Farriery	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:

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2. "—" = less than 0.5 per cent.

Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Numbers and per cent.

	North Nottinghamshire	*Greater Peterborough*	*Suffolk*	*County Durham*	*Northumberland*
Total number in training	600	500	700	1,400	600
Percentage in:					
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	0	3	9	1	0
Business Administration	13	19	6	23	34
Chemical Industry	0	—	—	0	2
Childcare	1	1	1	2	1
Electrical Installation Engineering	7	3	3	1	1
Engineering Manufacturing	26	24	15	28	17
Engineering Construction	0	—	2	1	—
Information Technology	1	1	0	1	1
Marine Engineering	7	—	—	1	—
Polymers Sector	—	—	—	0	—
Retailing	4	4	3	5	7
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—
Travel Service	1	4	2	1	1
Construction	8	—	18	10	8
Plumbing	1	1	—	2	1
Wool Textiles	—	—	—	—	—
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	—	—	—	—
Accounting	1	8	3	1	1
Air Transport	—	—	—	—	—
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	0	—
Bakers	—	—	—	—	0
Builders Merchants	—	—	—	—	—
Bus and Coach	0	—	—	—	—
Carpet Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity	1	—	1	—	—
Engineering Services	1	1	—	0	1
Estate Agencies	—	—	—	—	—
Fire Services	—	—	—	—	0
Furniture Manufacturing	—	—	0	—	—
Glass	—	—	—	—	—
Hairdressing	5	3	7	6	10
Healthcare	2	—	—	0	—
Horticulture (amenity)	—	—	—	—	—
Hotel and Catering	3	8	13	2	2
Knitting and lace	0	—	—	—	—
Man-made fibres	—	—	—	—	—
Meat training	—	—	—	—	—
Paper and Board	—	—	—	—	—
Printing	1	2	—	—	—
Road Haulage	—	1	0	—	—
Seafish	—	—	—	—	—
Security	—	—	—	1	0
Sports and Recreation	5	—	1	0	1
Tell Communications	—	—	—	—	—
Timber Trade	—	—	—	1	—
Motor Industry	10	11	8	9	4
Health and Social Care	2	6	7	3	6
Newspapers	—	—	—	—	—
Operating Department Practice	—	—	—	—	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	—	—	—	—
Banking Services	—	—	—	—	—
Floristry	—	—	—	0	0
Horses	0	—	—	—	—
Insurance	—	—	0	—	—
Museums	—	—	—	—	—
Plumbing	—	—	—	—	1
Rail	—	—	—	—	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	—	—	—	—	—
Farriery	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:

1. As the information on the sector breakdown is from the MA Database, it is only possible to give percentages, not actual numbers.

2. "—" = less than 0.5 per cent.

Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Numbers and per cent.

	Teeside	*Tyneside*	*Sunderland City*	*Barnsley/ Doncaster*	*Bradford*	*Calderdale/ Kirklees*
Total number in training	1,200	1,500	700	900	500	1,000
Percentage in:						
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	1	—	—	2	—	0
Business Administration	11	24	22	12	6	7
Chemical Industry	1	0	—	—	3	3
Childcare	4	—	—	0	7	3
Electrical Installation Engineering	4	2	2	7	4	8
Engineering Manufacturing	21	2	17	15	25	30
Engineering Construction	20	0	—	—	—	—
Information Technology	4	8	0	2	1	1
Marine Engineering	1	12	—	—	0	3
Polymers Sector	0	0	—	—	—	0
Retailing	12	15	9	11	3	7
Steel Industry	—	—	—	0	—	—
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—	—
Travel Service	2	1	2	2	1	4
Construction	3	0	13	9	13	5
Plumbing	1	0	2	1	3	1
Wool Textiles	—	—	—	—	7	8
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	—	—	—	—	—
Accounting	0	7	1	5	0	3
Air Transport	—	—	—	—	—	—
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bakers	—	0	1	—	0	—
Builders Merchants	—	1	—	0	—	—
Bus and Coach	—	—	—	—	—	—
Carpet Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity	—	—	1	0	—	—
Engineering Services	2	0	0	0	1	0
Estate Agencies	—	2	—	0	—	0
Fire Services	—	0	—	—	—	—
Furniture Manufacturing	—	—	0	—	—	0
Glass	—	—	—	0	—	1
Hairdressing	1	3	4	10	2	3
Healthcare	1	6	—	—	—	—
Horticulture (amenity)	1	—	—	—	—	—
Hotel and Catering	7	1	2	3	11	5
Knitting and lace	—	—	—	—	—	—
Man-made fibres	—	—	—	—	—	—
Meat training	—	—	—	—	0	0
Paper and Board	—	—	—	—	—	—
Printing	1	0	1	0	4	1
Road Haulage	—	0	—	0	—	—
Seafish	—	—	—	—	—	—
Security	—	1	—	—	—	—
Sports and Recreation	0	—	—	2	2	1
Tell Communications	—	—	—	—	—	—
Timber Trade	0	—	—	2	—	—
Motor Industry	4	7	16	13	5	5
Health and Social Care	0	7	6	1	1	0
Newspapers	—	—	—	—	1	—
Operating Department Practice	—	—	—	—	—	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	—	—	—	—	—
Banking Services	—	—	—	—	—	—
Floristry	0	—	—	—	—	—
Horses	—	—	—	—	—	—
Insurance	—	—	—	—	—	—
Museums	—	0	—	—	—	—
Plumbing	—	—	—	1	—	—
Rail	—	—	—	0	—	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	—	—	—	—	—	—
Farriery	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:

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2. "—" = less than 0.5 per cent.

Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Modern apprenticeship England and Wales—trainees in each sector as at 5 January 1997

Numbers and per cent.

	Humberside	*Leeds*	*Rotherham*	*Sheffield*	*Wakefield*
Total number in training	2,200	900	600	800	300
Percentage in:					
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	2	0	1	—	—
Business Administration	14	19	13	10	15
Chemical Industry	3	—	—	0	6
Childcare	0	1	1	3	2
Electrical Installation Engineering	4	15	3	4	6
Engineering Manufacturing	15	9	23	20	5
Engineering Construction	0	—	—	—	—
Information Technology	2	8	2	1	1
Marine Engineering	1	1	0	—	—
Polymers Sector	—	—	—	—	—
Retailing	3	6	2	10	5
Steel Industry	0	—	—	2	—
Steel Industry	1	—	2	1	—
Travel Service	1	2	11	0	2
Construction	18	6	11	13	18
Plumbing	1	0	2	1	3
Wool Textiles	—	—	—	—	1
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	—	—	—	—
Accounting	2	3	2	2	4
Air Transport	—	0	0	—	—
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	—	—
Bakers	—	—	—	—	—
Builders Merchants	—	—	—	0	0
Bus and Coach	0	—	—	—	—
Carpet Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity	—	—	—	—	2
Engineering Services	0	1	0	0	0
Estate Agencies	0	0	—	—	—
Fire Services	1	—	—	—	—
Furniture Manufacturing	0	1	—	0	2
Glass	—	—	—	0	—
Hairdressing	14	7	3	7	14
Healthcare	0	—	6	19	—
Horticulture (amenity)	0	0	—	0	—
Hotel and Catering	1	3	6	3	2
Knitting and lace	—	—	—	—	—
Man-made fibres	—	—	—	—	—
Meat training	0	—	—	—	—
Paper and Board	—	0	—	—	—
Printing	0	3	1	0	2
Road Haulage	—	—	1	—	—
Seafish	—	—	—	—	—
Security	0	—	—	—	—
Sports and Recreation	—	0	—	—	—
Tell Communications	0	—	—	—	—
Timber Trade	—	—	—	—	—
Motor Industry	14	13	2	3	9
Health and Social Care	2	—	3	—	2
Newspapers	—	—	—	—	—
Operating Department Practice	—	—	1	—	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	—	2	—	—
Banking Services	—	—	—	—	—
Floristry	—	—	—	—	—
Horses	—	—	—	—	—
Insurance	—	—	1	—	—
Museums	—	—	—	—	—
Plumbing	—	—	—	—	—
Rail	—	—	—	—	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	0	—	—	—	—
Farriery	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:

1. As the information on the sector breakdown is from the MA Database, it is only possible to give percentages, not actual numbers.

2. "—" = less than 0.5 per cent.

Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Numbers and per cent.

	North Yorkshire	*Bolton/Bury*	*Normidtec*	*South and East Cheshire*	*Cumbria*
Total number in training	900	1,000	900	600	1,300
Percentage in:					
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	9	—	0	*	3
Business Administration	8	15	26	*	11
Chemical Industry	—	0	19	*	—
Childcare	1	6	1	*	14
Electrical Installation Engineering	4	4	9	*	11
Engineering Manufacturing	9	20	10	*	15
Engineering Construction	—	3	—	*	—
Information Technology	1	0	6	*	1
Marine Engineering	—	0	—	*	13
Polymers Sector	0	0	0	*	—
Retailing	12	9	4	*	6
Steel Industry	0	—	—	*	—
Steel Industry	—	0	—	*	—
Travel Service	1	2	0	*	0
Construction	21	14	7	*	5
Plumbing	3	2	—	*	0
Wool Textiles	—	—	—	*	—
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	—	—	*	—
Accounting	5	2	3	*	1
Air Transport	—	—	—	*	—
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	*	—
Bakers	—	2	—	*	0
Builders Merchants	1	—	—	*	0
Bus and Coach	—	—	—	*	—
Carpet Manufacturing	—	—	—	*	—
Electricity	3	—	—	*	—
Engineering Services	0	—	—	*	—
Estate Agencies	—	—	—	*	1
Fire Services	—	—	—	*	—
Furniture Manufacturing	—	0	—	*	—
Glass	—	—	—	*	0
Hairdressing	4	7	2	*	2
Healthcare	—	0	2	*	1
Horticulture (amenity)	—	—	—	*	—
Hotel and Catering	5	1	3	*	6
Knitting and lace	—	—	—	*	—
Man-made fibres	—	—	—	*	—
Meat training	—	—	—	*	—
Paper and Board	—	—	—	*	—
Printing	2	0	0	*	—
Road Haulage	—	—	—	*	1
Seafish	—	—	—	*	—
Security	—	—	—	*	—
Sports and Recreation	—	1	—	*	0
Tell Communications	—	2	—	*	—
Timber Trade	0	0	—	*	—
Motor Industry	9	7	4	*	7
Health and Social Care	1	2	2	*	1
Newspapers	—	0	—	*	0
Operating Department Practice	—	—	—	*	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	0	0	*	—
Banking Services	—	—	—	*	—
Floristry	—	0	—	*	—
Horses	—	—	—	*	—
Insurance	—	—	—	*	—
Museums	—	—	—	*	1
Plumbing	0	0	—	*	—
Rail	—	—	—	*	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	1	—	—	*	—
Farriery	—	—	—	*	—

Notes:

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Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Numbers and per cent.

	Eltec	*Lawtec*	*Manchester*	*Merseyside*	*Oldham*
Total number in training	1,500	1,900	2,100	1,900	500
Percentage in:					
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	—	—	0	—	—
Business Administration	24	15	25	7	12
Chemical Industry	—	0	0	—	0
Childcare	2	—	5	1	1
Electrical Installation Engineering	4	3	10	5	1
Engineering Manufacturing	20	30	13	14	30
Engineering Construction	—	0	—	—	—
Information Technology	1	1	1	0	2
Marine Engineering	—	—	—	—	—
Polymers Sector	—	0	0	0	0
Retailing	5	2	4	18	10
Steel Industry	—	—	0	—	—
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—
Travel Service	—	1	4	0	2
Construction	8	12	10	16	6
Plumbing	3	3	0	2	2
Wool Textiles	—	—	—	—	—
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	0	—	—	—
Accounting	1	1	1	1	3
Air Transport	—	—	—	—	—
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	—	—
Bakers	0	0	0	—	1
Builders Merchants	—	—	—	0	—
Bus and Coach	4	2	—	0	—
Carpet Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity	—	—	—	—	—
Engineering Services	—	1	2	0	1
Estate Agencies	—	—	—	0	0
Fire Services	—	0	—	—	—
Furniture Manufacturing	4	2	0	1	1
Glass	0	0	—	0	—
Hairdressing	4	3	9	11	9
Healthcare	1	1	1	1	—
Horticulture (amenity)	—	0	0	0	1
Hotel and Catering	1	5	1	3	1
Knitting and lace	—	—	—	—	—
Man-made fibres	—	—	—	—	—
Meat training	0	1	1	—	1
Paper and Board	0	—	—	—	—
Printing	1	1	1	—	—
Road Haulage	—	—	0	—	—
Seafish	—	—	—	—	—
Security	1	—	0	0	—
Sports and Recreation	1	—	2	—	2
Tell Communications	—	—	—	—	—
Timber Trade	—	—	0	—	—
Motor Industry	9	9	7	10	2
Health and Social Care	5	5	1	9	11
Newspapers	—	1	—	—	—
Operating Department Practice	—	—	—	—	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	—	—	0	—
Banking Services	—	—	—	—	—
Floristry	—	—	—	—	—
Horses	—	—	—	—	—
Insurance	—	—	—	—	—
Museums	—	—	—	—	—
Plumbing	—	—	—	—	0
Rail	—	—	—	—	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	—	—	—	—	—
Farriery	—	—	—	—	—

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Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Numbers and per cent.

	Rochdale	*St. Helens CC&T*	*Stockport and High Peak*	*Metrotec*	*Cewtec*	*Birmingham*
Total number in training	500	600	500	600	700	1,600
Percentage in:						
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	—	0	—	—	0	0
Business Administration	21	14	9	14	6	17
Chemical Industry	—	4	—	—	10	—
Childcare	4	3	11	—	0	10
Electrical Installation Engineering	7	8	5	7	4	1
Engineering Manufacturing	19	32	42	21	27	16
Engineering Construction	—	2	—	0	—	—
Information Technology	2	—	1	1	2	3
Marine Engineering	—	—	—	—	2	—
Polymers Sector	0	—	—	—	—	—
Retailing	2	0	8	3	5	11
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—	—
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—	—
Travel Service	—	1	1	1	0	4
Construction	15	5	1	15	13	6
Plumbing	1	7	—	6	—	—
Wool Textiles	—	—	—	—	—	—
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	0	—	—	—	—
Accounting	2	1	2	2	1	—
Air Transport	—	—	—	—	—	—
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bakers	—	—	—	1	—	1
Builders Merchants	—	—	—	2	—	—
Bus and Coach	—	—	—	—	—	—
Carpet Manufacturing	—	1	—	—	—	—
Electricity	—	—	—	—	2	0
Engineering Services	—	2	2	1	—	—
Estate Agencies	—	—	0	2	—	0
Fire Services	—	—	—	—	0	—
Furniture Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	0	—
Glass	—	4	0	—	—	—
Hairdressing	10	7	6	4	6	6
Healthcare	—	—	—	—	2	—
Horticulture (amenity)	—	—	—	0	—	—
Hotel and Catering	3	1	3	1	6	6
Knitting and lace	—	—	—	—	—	—
Man-made fibres	—	—	—	—	—	—
Meat training	1	1	—	—	—	—
Paper and Board	—	—	—	—	—	—
Printing	—	0	2	1	0	0
Road Haulage	—	1	—	—	—	—
Seafish	—	—	—	—	0	—
Security	—	—	—	0	—	—
Sports and Recreation	3	2	—	0	0	—
Tell Communications	—	—	—	0	—	—
Timber Trade	—	—	—	—	—	—
Motor Industry	6	5	7	13	4	6
Health and Social Care	3	—	—	3	5	13
Newspapers	—	—	—	—	—	—
Operating Department Practice	—	—	—	—	1	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	—	—	—	—	—
Banking Services	—	—	—	—	—	—
Floristry	—	—	—	—	—	—
Horses	—	—	—	—	—	—
Insurance	—	—	—	—	—	—
Museums	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plumbing	—	—	—	—	0	—
Rail	—	—	—	—	—	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	—	—	—	—	—	—
Farriery	—	—	—	—	—	—

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MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Numbers and per cent.

	Central England	*Coventry*	*Dudley*	*Hawtec*	*Sandwell*
Total number in training	300	1,000	500	600	400
Percentage in:					
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	2	—	—	5	—
Business Administration	8	11	9	7	10
Chemical Industry	—	0	—	—	—
Childcare	3	1	8	4	0
Electrical Installation Engineering	8	8	11	6	0
Engineering Manufacturing	42	39	32	20	37
Engineering Construction	1	0	—	—	25
Information Technology	—	1	3	1	0
Marine Engineering	—	—	—	—	1
Polymers Sector	—	—	—	0	—
Retailing	11	4	3	14	1
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	6
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—
Travel Service	2	4	—	0	—
Construction	2	4	6	1	2
Plumbing	—	0	11	1	—
Wool Textiles	—	—	—	—	—
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	—	—	—	—
Accounting	1	2	3	7	2
Air Transport	—	—	—	—	—
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	—	—
Bakers	—	—	—	0	—
Builders Merchants	—	1	—	0	—
Bus and Coach	—	9	—	—	—
Carpet Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity	—	0	—	—	0
Engineering Services	—	—	—	—	—
Estate Agencies	—	0	—	—	—
Fire Services	—	—	—	—	—
Furniture Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—
Glass	1	—	—	—	—
Hairdressing	8	8	3	9	1
Healthcare	—	0	—	1	—
Horticulture (amenity)	—	—	—	1	—
Hotel and Catering	1	3	2	8	—
Knitting and lace	—	—	—	—	—
Man-made fibres	—	—	—	—	—
Meat training	—	—	—	0	—
Paper and Board	—	—	—	—	—
Printing	—	0	—	0	1
Road Haulage	—	—	—	1	—
Seafish	—	—	—	—	—
Security	—	—	—	—	—
Sports and Recreation	—	0	—	4	—
Tell Communications	—	—	—	—	—
Timber Trade	—	—	—	—	—
Motor Industry	10	5	7	6	5
Health and Social Care	—	2	2	2	3
Newspapers	—	—	—	—	—
Operating Department Practice	—	—	—	—	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	—	—	—	—
Banking Services	—	—	—	—	—
Floristry	—	—	—	1	—
Horses	—	—	—	—	—
Insurance	—	—	—	—	5
Museums	—	—	—	—	—
Plumbing	—	—	—	0	—
Rail	—	—	—	—	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	—	—	—	—	—
Farriery	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:

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Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Numbers and per cent.

	Shropshire	*Staffordshire*	*Walsall*	*Wolverhampton*	*Mid Glamorgan*
Total number in training	500	1,100	400	500	900
Percentage in:					
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	1	5	—	0	3
Business Administration	6	7	13	18	10
Chemical Industry	—	—	0	3	0
Childcare	0	4	—	—	0
Electrical Installation Engineering	9	8	13	7	5
Engineering Manufacturing	28	21	32	24	25
Engineering Construction	—	0	—	—	—
Information Technology	1	0	0	0	2
Marine Engineering	2	—	—	—	7
Polymers Sector	3	—	2	—	1
Retailing	3	11	2	6	2
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—
Travel Service	1	4	2	—	0
Construction	1	4	8	5	7
Plumbing	1	0	—	—	3
Wool Textiles	—	0	—	—	0
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	—	—	—	5
Accounting	6	10	—	2	2
Air Transport	—	—	—	—	1
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	—	—
Bakers	—	—	—	—	0
Builders Merchants	—	—	—	—	—
Bus and Coach	—	—	—	—	—
Carpet Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity	0	—	1	—	—
Engineering Services	0	—	—	—	1
Estate Agencies	1	—	—	—	—
Fire Services	—	—	—	—	—
Furniture Manufacturing	0	—	—	—	0
Glass	—	0	—	—	—
Hairdressing	3	14	5	11	6
Healthcare	0	1	—	0	0
Horticulture (amenity)	—	—	—	0	0
Hotel and Catering	4	1	2	14	2
Knitting and lace	—	—	—	—	—
Man-made fibres	—	—	—	—	—
Meat training	1	0	—	—	—
Paper and Board	—	—	—	—	—
Printing	1	—	1	—	1
Road Haulage	—	1	—	—	—
Seafish	—	—	—	—	—
Security	—	0	—	—	1
Sports and Recreation	0	—	6	3	3
Tell Communications	—	—	—	—	—
Timber Trade	1	—	—	0	—
Motor Industry	27	7	11	5	12
Health and Social Care	—	—	3	—	1
Newspapers	—	—	—	—	—
Operating Department Practice	—	—	—	—	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	—	—	—	—
Banking Services	—	—	—	—	—
Floristry	—	—	—	—	—
Horses	—	—	—	—	—
Insurance	—	—	—	—	—
Museums	—	—	—	—	—
Plumbing	—	—	—	—	—
Rail	—	—	—	1	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	—	—	—	—	—
Farriery	1	—	—	—	0

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Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Numbers and per cent.

	South Glamorgan	*Gwent*	*North East Wales*	*North West Wales*	*West Wales*
Total number in training	700	1,000	800	500	1,600
Percentage in:					
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	*	2	5	2	5
Business Administration	*	6	17	9	6
Chemical Industry	*	—	3	0	0
Childcare	*	0	1	25	0
Electrical Installation Engineering	*	4	13	5	3
Engineering Manufacturing	*	15	25	16	20
Engineering Construction	*	0	0	—	0
Information Technology	*	—	3	1	1
Marine Engineering	*	—	—	—	0
Polymers Sector	*	—	—	1	—
Retailing	*	2	4	3	6
Steel Industry	*	—	0	—	—
Steel Industry	*	9	4	—	9
Travel Service	*	1	3	1	0
Construction	*	25	3	7	15
Plumbing	*	4	1	4	3
Wool Textiles	*	—	—	—	—
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	*	11	1	1	12
Accounting	*	3	3	1	0
Air Transport	*	—	—	0	—
Arts and Entertainment	*	—	—	0	—
Bakers	*	—	0	1	—
Builders Merchants	*	—	—	—	—
Bus and Coach	*	—	—	—	—
Carpet Manufacturing	*	—	—	—	—
Electricity	*	—	—	—	0
Engineering Services	*	1	0	2	0
Estate Agencies	*	—	0	—	—
Fire Services	*	—	—	—	—
Furniture Manufacturing	*	—	1	—	—
Glass	*	—	—	—	0
Hairdressing	*	5	2	5	6
Healthcare	*	—	0	1	1
Horticulture (amenity)	*	1	0	1	—
Hotel and Catering	*	3	1	3	1
Knitting and lace	*	—	—	—	—
Man-made fibres	*	—	—	—	—
Meat training	*	—	0	0	1
Paper and Board	*	—	—	—	0
Printing	*	1	—	1	—
Road Haulage	*	—	—	—	—
Seafish	*	—	—	—	1
Security	*	—	—	—	—
Sports and Recreation	*	—	1	—	—
Tell Communications	*	—	—	—	—
Timber Trade	*	—	—	—	—
Motor Industry	*	9	7	6	3
Health and Social Care	*	0	1	2	3
Newspapers	*	—	—	—	—
Operating Department Practice	*	—	—	—	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	*	—	—	—	—
Banking Services	*	—	—	—	—
Floristry	*	—	—	—	—
Horses	*	—	—	—	—
Insurance	*	—	—	0	—
Museums	*	—	—	—	—
Plumbing	*	—	—	—	—
Rail	*	—	—	—	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	*	—	—	—	—
Farriery	*	—	—	0	—

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Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Numbers and per cent.

	Westec	*Devon and Cornwall*	*Dorset*	*Gloucestershire*	*Somerset*	*Wiltshire*
Total number in training	1,400	2,200	900	700	600	400
Percentage in:						
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	—	4	0	2	4	4
Business Administration	15	7	3	12	9	4
Chemical Industry	—	—	0	—	—	—
Childcare	1	1	5	4	4	6
Electrical Installation Engineering	7	7	3	5	3	4
Engineering Manufacturing	19	19	15	20	34	46
Engineering Construction	—	—	—	—	—	—
Information Technology	3	0	0	1	1	—
Marine Engineering	1	5	1	5	—	10
Polymers Sector	—	—	—	0	—	—
Retailing	11	3	4	5	2	6
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—	—
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—	—
Travel Service	1	2	1	0	1	—
Construction	1	21	0	4	7	0
Plumbing	1	3	—	1	—	0
Wool Textiles	—	—	—	—	—	—
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	—	—	—	—	—
Accounting	2	4	1	3	3	—
Air Transport	—	—	1	—	—	—
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	—	0	—
Bakers	—	0	0	—	—	—
Builders Merchants	0	0	—	0	—	—
Bus and Coach	—	—	—	—	—	—
Carpet Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity	—	—	—	—	—	—
Engineering Services	1	—	0	1	—	—
Estate Agencies	0	0	0	1	1	—
Fire Services	—	—	—	0	—	—
Furniture Manufacturing	—	—	0	—	—	—
Glass	0	—	0	—	0	—
Hairdressing	13	0	13	13	11	0
Healthcare	2	3	1	—	8	1
Horticulture (amenity)	0	—	—	1	—	—
Hotel and Catering	2	4	13	2	1	3
Knitting and lace	—	—	—	—	—	—
Man-made fibres	—	—	—	—	1	—
Meat training	—	—	—	—	1	—
Paper and Board	—	—	—	—	—	—
Printing	2	1	0	2	—	—
Road Haulage	0	—	—	—	—	—
Seafish	—	—	—	—	—	—
Security	0	—	—	0	—	0
Sports and Recreation	1	0	4	2	—	0
Tell Communications	0	—	—	0	—	1
Timber Trade	—	—	—	—	—	—
Motor Industry	14	13	22	15	7	5
Health and Social Care	0	1	10	0	3	8
Newspapers	—	—	0	—	—	0
Operating Department Practice	0	—	—	—	—	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	—	—	—	—	—
Banking Services	0	—	—	—	—	—
Floristry	—	—	—	—	0	—
Horses	—	—	—	—	—	—
Insurance	0	—	—	—	—	—
Museums	—	—	—	—	0	—
Plumbing	—	—	0	0	—	—
Rail	—	—	—	—	—	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	—	—	—	—	—	—
Farriery	—	—	—	—	—	—

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Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Modern apprenticeship England and Wales—trainees in each sector as at 5 January 1997

Numbers and per cent.

	Essex	*Hampshire*	*Heart of England*	*Hertfordshire*	*Kent*
Total number in training	2,000	1,700	500	900	1,900
Percentage in:					
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	—	—	0	—	1
Business Administration	13	6	13	9	13
Chemical Industry	0	—	—	1	0
Childcare	4	3	0	12	0
Electrical Installation Engineering	9	6	15	4	7
Engineering Manufacturing	22	17	26	21	5
Engineering Construction	0	—	—	—	1
Information Technology	1	1	—	1	3
Marine Engineering	—	7	—	—	1
Polymers Sector	0	—	0	—	0
Retailing	7	9	8	11	13
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—
Steel Industry	—	0	0	—	—
Travel Service	2	2	4	3	1
Construction	3	4	1	0	2
Plumbing	1	0	0	0	0
Wool Textiles	—	—	—	—	—
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	—	—	—	—
Accounting	1	2	4	0	1
Air Transport	0	—	—	—	—
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	—	—
Bakers	—	0	—	—	—
Builders Merchants	0	0	—	—	—
Bus and Coach	—	0	—	—	—
Carpet Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity	0	0	0	—	0
Engineering Services	0	0	2	—	—
Estate Agencies	0	0	0	—	—
Fire Services	—	—	—	—	—
Furniture Manufacturing	—	0	—	—	—
Glass	—	—	—	—	—
Hairdressing	7	12	7	3	25
Healthcare	9	0	1	—	2
Horticulture (amenity)	—	1	0	—	1
Hotel and Catering	12	10	7	20	6
Knitting and lace	—	—	—	—	—
Man-made fibres	—	—	—	—	—
Meat training	—	—	—	—	0
Paper and Board	—	—	—	—	1
Printing	1	1	2	1	2
Road Haulage	—	—	—	—	3
Seafish	—	—	—	—	—
Security	—	2	—	2	—
Sports and Recreation	0	0	—	—	0
Tell Communications	—	—	—	1	0
Timber Trade	—	0	—	—	—
Motor Industry	6	14	6	11	6
Health and Social Care	2	3	2	—	4
Newspapers	—	—	—	—	1
Operating Department Practice	—	0	—	—	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	—	—	—	—
Banking Services	—	—	—	—	—
Floristry	—	0	1	—	—
Horses	0	—	—	—	—
Insurance	—	0	—	—	1
Museums	—	—	—	—	-
Plumbing	—	0	—	—	0
Rail	—	—	—	—	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	—	—	—	—	—
Farriery	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:

1. As the information on the sector breakdown is from the MA Database, it is only possible to give percentages, not actual numbers.

2. "—" = less than 0.5 per cent.

Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Numbers and per cent.

	Milton Keynes	*Surrey*	*Sussex*	*Thames Valley*	*Aztec*
Total number in training	400	800	1,200	1,400	400
Percentage in:					
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	—	1	0	—	—
Business Administration	32	3	10	15	17
Chemical Industry	—	—	—	0	—
Childcare	—	5	6	10	4
Electrical Installation Engineering	1	9	7	11	10
Engineering Manufacturing	24	12	2	8	2
Engineering Construction	—	0	—	—	1
Information Technology	3	—	1	2	1
Marine Engineering	0	—	—	—	—
Polymers Sector	—	—	—	—	—
Retailing	4	8	9	25	21
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—
Travel Service	0	4	3	3	3
Construction	0	2	7	—	—
Plumbing	—	1	3	0	2
Wool Textiles	—	—	—	—	0
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	—	—	—	—
Accounting	14	1	2	1	1
Air Transport	—	0	—	—	—
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	—	—
Bakers	—	—	—	3	0
Builders Merchants	—	1	0	—	0
Bus and Coach	—	—	—	—	—
Carpet Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity	—	—	0	—	—
Engineering Services	—	—	1	0	—
Estate Agencies	—	—	1	—	5
Fire Services	—	—	—	0	—
Furniture Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—
Glass	—	—	0	—	—
Hairdressing	1	3	7	4	16
Healthcare	—	—	—	0	—
Horticulture (amenity)	—	—	1	—	—
Hotel and Catering	4	16	14	6	4
Knitting and lace	—	—	—	—	—
Man-made fibres	—	0	—	—	—
Meat training	—	—	—	—	—
Paper and Board	—	—	—	—	—
Printing	0	1	3	5	0
Road Haulage	1	—	—	0	—
Seafish	—	—	—	—	—
Security	—	3	—	—	3
Sports and Recreation	—	2	1	1	3
Tell Communications	—	—	1	—	—
Timber Trade	—	0	0	—	—
Motor Industry	13	12	10	6	6
Health and Social Care	—	15	11	—	—
Newspapers	—	—	—	—	—
Operating Department Practice	—	—	—	—	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	—	—	—	—
Banking Services	—	—	—	—	—
Floristry	1	0	—	—	—
Horses	—	—	—	—	—
Insurance	0	—	0	—	—
Museums	—	—	—	—	—
Plumbing	—	—	0	—	—
Rail	—	—	—	—	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	—	—	—	—	—
Farriery	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:

1. As the information on the sector breakdown is from the MA Database, it is only possible to give percentages, not actual numbers.

2. "—" = less than 0.5 per cent.

Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

	North London	*North West London*	*Cilntec*	*Central London*	*London East*	*Solotec*	*West London*
Total number in training	1,000	500	700	400	900	900	800
Percentage in:							
Agriculture and Commercial Horticulture	—	—	—	—	—	—	11
Business Administration	8	2	14	13	3	13	—
Chemical Industry	0	—	—	—	—	—	—
Childcare	2	7	2	4	—	4	7
Electrical Installation Engineering	1	5	15	16	6	12	—
Engineering Manufacturing	0	1	4	—	86	17	13
Engineering Construction	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Information Technology	0	—	0	1	0	0	1
Marine Engineering	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Polymers Sector	—	—	3	—	—	—	—
Retailing	13	14	8	21	—	12	1
Steel Industry	0	—	—	—	—	0	—
Steel Industry	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Travel Service	2	1	0	5	—	7	—
Construction	2	—	6	1	4	—	2
Plumbing	0	1	1	0	—	—	—
Wool Textiles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Welsh Manufacturing Engineering	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Accounting	3	1	1	—	—	0	—
Air Transport	0	—	—	—	—	—	—
Arts and Entertainment	—	—	—	—	—	3	—
Bakers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Builders Merchants	0	0	0	—	—	—	—
Bus and Coach	—	—	—	1	—	—	0
Carpet Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity	0	—	1	—	—	—	0
Engineering Services	—	13	—	—	—	—	—
Estate Agencies	—	0	1	—	—	1	—
Fire Services	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Furniture Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Glass	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hairdressing	16	1	3	11	—	10	0
Healthcare	0	—	—	—	—	2	—
Horticulture (amenity)	0	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hotel and Catering	36	31	2	16	0	5	55
Knitting and lace	—	—	0	—	—	—	0
Man-made fibres	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Meat training	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Paper and Board	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Printing	0	—	19	—	—	—	—
Road Haulage	—	—	—	—	—	4	—
Seafish	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Security	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sports and Recreation	4	7	0	6	—	—	0
Tell Communications	2	—	0	1	—	—	0
Timber Trade	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Motor Industry	7	11	13	3	—	6	2
Health and Social Care	1	5	—	1	—	3	2
Newspapers	3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Operating Department Practice	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Physiological Measurement Technicians	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Banking Services	—	—	4	—	—	—	—
Floristry	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Horses	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Insurance	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Museums	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plumbing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rail	—	—	0	—	—	—	—
Agriculture and Garden Machinery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Farriery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:

1. As the information on the sector breakdown is from the MA Database, it is only possible to give percentages, not actual numbers.
2. "—" = less than 0.5 per cent.

Source:

MA Database; TEC Management Information.

Cash Limits

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she plans changes to cash limits and running cost limits on votes within her responsibility for 1996–97. [14254]

Mr. Robin Squire *[pursuant to his reply, 31 January 1997, c. 397–98]:* The cash limit for class I, vote 3: Employment Service will now be decreased by £19,553,000 rather than £20,303,000. Therefore, the new cash limit will be £1,269,42,000 not £1,268,674,000. This change has arisen because the funding of annual compensation payments for early departures between the Employment Service and the Cabinet Office will now be made by direct payment rather than a departmental transfer between votes.

The running costs provision for class IX, vote 3 will therefore be decreased by £2,243,000 rather than £2,993,000 to £907,908,000 and not £907,158,000. The gross running costs limit for the Department for Education and Employment is increased by £4,402,000 to £1,281,816,000.

DEFENCE

Married Quarters (Rent)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current average rent per week in service married quarters; and what was the average in each of the last five years. [17935]

Mr. Soames: The average weekly charges for service family quarters are given in the table, and are based on furnished accommodation in England, Scotland and Wales and of the most commonly occupied type of accommodation.

Service family quarters charge for last five years

	1993–94 £	*1994–95* £	*1995–96* £	*1996–97* £	*1997–98* £
Officers	41.30	43.12	47.04	53.48	56.07
Other ranks	26.46	27.74	29.68	34.02	35.93

Additionally, all service personnel pay a contribution in lieu of council tax. Some of the quarters are occupied by civilians and these charges are based on market rents which are assessed by local defence lands service offices.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the percentage increases per annum in rents for service family quarters in each of the past five years; what are the planned increases in each year of the planning period; and if he will make a statement. [17936]

Mr. Soames: The average percentage increases recommended by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body and accepted by the Government for service family quarters are as follows:

1993–94: 1.5 per cent.

1994–95: 5 per cent.

1995–96: 5–8 per cent.

1996–97: 10–25 per cent.

1997–98: 2.7–9.1 per cent.

Charges are recommended annually by the AFPRB, which has always followed the principle that charges levied on service personnel should compare fairly with the costs civilians have to incur for comparable housing. The higher percentage increases this year are for the largest, best-quality officer housing.

Admissible Schools List

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the current version of the admissible schools list showing the number of pupils supported by his Department at each school. [17934]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 26 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *196*.

Proof and Experimental Work

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on proof and experimental work carried out overseas, broken down by the countries in which this work takes place, in each of the last five years; and what estimate he has made of the proportion of this work which could be carried out at range facilities in the United Kingdom. [17673]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The detailed information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. A preliminary survey, however, indicates that in the past five years more than £8 million has been spent on proof and experimental work in a range of overseas countries. Such work is conducted overseas when it provides better value for money, or when no suitable range is available in the UK, or when extreme climate conditions are required.

Eskmeal and Shoeburyness Ranges

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to receive the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency study on the future of the Eskmeals and Shoeburyness ranges; and if he will make arrangements for the report to be made publicly available. [17674]

Mr. Arbuthnot: An interim report was completed by DERA at the end of January. It did not make firm recommendations for the closure of either Eskmeals or Shoeburyness but suggested further detailed work into how the costs of the Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation land ranges might be reduced. Given the report's interim nature, I do not believe it appropriate for publication at present, but as soon as DERA has completed consultations with its MOD customers on the implications of the proposals, DERA intends to publish a

consultative document setting out the options and proposing a way ahead. This will be circulated to DERA staff, trade unions and those with an interest. I expect to approve the release of this document within the next few weeks.

Guards (Hours)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent changes his Department has made to the hours and shifts worked by service personnel acting as guards on *(a)* HMS Raleigh, *(b)* HMS Drake and *(c)* Stonehouse barracks. [17939]

Mr. Soames : There have been no recent changes to the hours and shifts for service personnel on guard duty at Stonehouse barracks or HMS Drake. At HMS Raleigh, the usual five-week shift pattern was replaced on 2 January 1997 by a four-week pattern to overcome a temporary manpower shortage. This will not increase the length of the normal 12-hour shifts—including stand-by time—and personnel will receive approximately two weeks' leave in every four weeks.

BSE

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 February *(Official Report* column *715*, if he will list the BSE-related material which *(a)* is and *(b)* has been stored at RAF Quedgely. [17835]

Mr. Soames: There is currently no BSE-related material stored at RAF Quedgely. BSE pelleted material was stored between May and August 1996 until removed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17073]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A central record is not kept of individual items unaccounted for. All such cases are thoroughly investigated with a view to establishing the facts and preventing a recurrence. Where a loss has occurred and recovery proves impracticable, the items in question are written off, and the relevant appropriation account noted accordingly. Items over £100,000 value are reported and noted individually.

Twenty items of equipment have been reported as stolen in the past 12 months, with an estimated value of £75,300. Two thermal imagers and related items valued together at £69,589 were the only items valued at more than £5,000.

In addition, 29 items of information technology equipment have been reported as stolen in the past 12 months, with an estimated value of £31,043. None of these had an individual value of £5,000 or more.

No thefts of furniture have been reported.

This information does not include any losses from defence agencies, I have asked the chief executives to write direct to the hon. Member with relevant information.

Letter from J. A. Trewby to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that have been (a) stolen and (b) are otherwise unaccounted for during the past 12 months insofar as it applies to the Naval Bases and Supply Agency (NBSA) as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

The NBSA launched in December 1996 and is formed from a number of different management areas within the MOD. The exact information you have requested is not readily available due to system changes, but the following information is available for this financial year:

(a) Three items have been stolen with a total value of £7,937.48 (VAT inclusive). None of these were information technology items. No single item involved was valued in excess of £5,000.

(b) Material losses authorised this financial year amount to 907 items with a total value of £2,709,597.09 (VAT inclusive). This figure includes losses caused by damage to equipment. There were no losses of information technology equipment. Eleven of these cases involved items with an individual item value in excess of £5,000; these are listed below.

Item description	*Value £ (VAT inclusive)*
Fixed probe assembly	9,839.45
Gyro and card set kit	14,414.90
Rudder servo (quantity 2)	20,201.77
Fan centrifugal (quantity 2)	11,376.35
Filter module	5,254.60
Actuator rotary	9,770.13
Regulator assembly	8,328.40
Lifting/load	7,032.38
Vector voltmeter	5,876.18
Transmitter	10,250.00
Radar platform	6,164.69

Letter from R. H. Kyle to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

Items of equipment and furniture that have either been stolen or otherwise unaccounted for in the Royal Air Force Maintenance Group Defence Agency

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about items of equipment and furniture that have been stolen, lost or unaccounted for during the past 12 months because this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Maintenance Group Defence Agency. A list of all such items with an individual value exceeding £5,000 is given at Annex A. Actual losses are rare; when compared with the amount of equipment issued (more than 1 million items), the figure of 29 represents only 0.003% of the total number. There have been no losses of information technology equipment.

Annex A: RAF MGDA equipment and furniture losses

Serial number	*Item*	*Value of the item £*	*Stolen yes/no*
1	Flight compass 1081706	7,925	No
2	Value 118 7884	7,407	No
3	Transformer receiver 10D 9550582	9,666	No
4	Fairing assembly 1560 99 6131360	6,462	No
5	Screwjack assembly 1680 1591069	5,202	No
6	Pole assembly 26LX 6414634	6,487	No

Annex A: RAF MGDA equipment and furniture losses

Serial number	*Item*	*Value of the item £*	*Stolen yes/no*
7	Box assembly 26VC 23304	7,166	No
8	Coupling port 36DE 7752541	7,597	No
9	Leading edge 1560 99 6120145	6,221	No
10	Skin panel 26VC 8705542	11,005	No
11	Emruno 22MK2 11A 6345911	14,699	No
12	Nose cone 1560 01 2951228	35,849	No
13	Airbrakes Pt 1560 14 0416316	5,686	No
14	Housing 2915 14 419517	7,782	No
15	Nozzle port 26VN 7775986	6,035	No
16	Rodsighting 26DL 6011375	6,389	No
17	Brake unit 27G 1501909	5,948	No
18	Fan 5UD 4390830	5,695	No
19	Inverter 4F 513039	10,446	No
20	Jack airbrake 1650 99 733 9589	9,392	No
21	Fairing starboard 26VA 6057455	10,680	No
22	Standcocking 12A 9635240	6,130	No
23	Pump 37S 11568	18,495	No
24	Indicator B 110Q 6274221	8,187	No
25	Shaft assembly port 26VA 6049508	6,213	No
26	HPU fuel pump 4320 12 1931468	6,905	No
27	Case 136MG 379347	14,141	No
28	Batteries and transmitter	7,969	Yes
29	Message processor and video receiver 1195 01 255823	21,900	Under investigation

Letter from W. E. E. Boreham to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about stolen and unaccounted equipment and furniture, as this falls into my area of responsibility as Chief Constable/Chief Executive of the Ministry of Defence police Agency.

During the last twelve months I have identified the theft of one laptop computer, ten expandable batons, and one pair of handcuffs complete with pouch. The total value of the stolen equipment was some £2,290,00.

Letter from P. R. Wildman to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about items of equipment and furniture that have been stolen or otherwise unaccounted for by his Department and its agencies as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Military Survey Defence Agency.

One item of IT equipment has been stolen in the past twelve months with an estimated value of £500. No IT equipment was lost.

A small number of miscellaneous items were lost during the past twelve months. All cases were investigated and where recovery was impracticable the items were written off. No item was valued at £5,000 or more.

No thefts of furniture have been reported.

This information is exclusive to Military Survey Defence Agency.

Letter from A. J. Stables to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that have been stolen or otherwise unaccounted for during the past 12 months, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency.

There have been 30 items of equipment and furniture stolen during the period, for which the total estimated value was £20,048. This includes a vehicle and its contents valued at £14,851.

Four items of information technology material valued at a total of £993 were unaccounted for, as were 378 other items of equipment and furniture valued at a total of £13,610. In addition, a number of low cost cutlery items with a total estimated value of £1,032 were also unaccounted for.

Letter from W. H. J. Kelly to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked the Chief Executive of the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA) to reply to your Parliamentary Question, about the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture stolen or otherwise unaccounted for during the past 12 months within the NRTA. I am replying on behalf of the Chief Executive in his absence.

18 items of equipment have been reported as stolen in the past 12 months with an estimated total value of £2,896.84. Two of these items were furniture and one item was IT equipment. 101 items of equipment with an estimated value of £67,169.83 are unaccounted for, however, none of these had an individual value of £5,000 or more.

I hope that this is helpful.

Letter from David G. Wadsworth to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence seeking information about the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that (a) have been stolen and (b) are otherwise unaccounted for during the past 12 months, insofar as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Service Children's Schools Agency.

During the past 12 months there have been 3 separate reported incidents of theft of equipment from schools within British Forces Germany. The stolen equipment comprised of 8 individual items of classroom based Information Technology equipment at a total estimated value of £5,400 and 3 individual items of classroom based audio visual aids at a total estimated value of £500. These incidents were investigated by the Royal Military Police; however none of these items have since been recovered.

There has been no unaccounted losses to report against your point (b).

Letter from M. I. Laurie to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning lost or stolen equipment as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as the Chief Executive of the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre.

During the previous 12 months, three items of equipment have been stolen, with a total value of £3670. Two of these items were laptop computers valued at £1736 each.

Letter from G. Jones to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the cost and numbers of items of equipment and furniture that have been stolen or otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and agencies during the past 12 months, as these matters fall within my responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment Defence Agency. Specifically, you asked for a listing, by name, of any such items valued at £5000 or more, with information technology material shown separately.

During the last 12 months, 7 items, with a total value of £2848.10, have been unaccounted for at the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment. None of the items were information technology material.

Letter from R. V. Babington to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying in part to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about equipment and furniture that has been stolen or unaccounted for, in relation to my area of responsibility as the Chief Executive of the Ships Support Agency.

In the last twelve months there have been four items of information technology material stolen, at a value of £800. Two items of information technology material have also been lost or damaged during an attempted theft, at a value of £900.

Letter from John R. Prince to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about stolen and unaccounted items of equipment and furniture, as this matters falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Technical Support Agency (ATSA).

From a capital asset base of approximately 10,000 lines, we have still to account for 2 items as follows:

Item	*Value*
1 video camera	1,000
1 notebook computer	1,000

These are currently the subject of Ministry of Defence Police investigations. The asset base excludes furniture, which we do not generally account for as it tends to be of low value.

Letter from P. D. Foxton to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence on office equipment and furniture that has been stolen or otherwise unaccounted for during the last twelve months, for those areas that fall within my responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency (ABSDA).

To the best of my knowledge, following enquiries throughout the whole of ABSDA, office equipment to the value of £305 remains unaccounted for, made up in the main of minor items such as calculators and mains adapters. There is no proof of theft and there have therefore, been no criminal prosecutions. There have been no instances of information technology material going missing.

As a whole, office equipment in ABSDA, including information technology material, is well documented, highly visible and as a result, appropriately safeguarded.

I hope this fully answers your query.

Letter from J. R. Drew to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence about the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture stolen from, or unaccounted for by, his department and its agencies over the past 12 months. As this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO), I am replying in respect of this agency.

Thirteen items of IT equipment valued at £14,595 were written off in FY96/97. These were stolen in one incident at one of our Contract Repair Offices. This included a PC Server which originally cost £9,178. A full investigation by the police failed to shed any light on the burglary or the perpetrators and gave no prospect of recovery.

There is no consolidated figure yet available for all stores losses in FY 96/97. The total amount written off in FY 95/96 for all reasons was £24,545 covering 211 individual items.

Letter from C. A. Gordon to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about losses and thefts of equipment and furniture form this Agency over the last 12 months, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Deputy Chief Executive of the Army Individual Training Organisation.

Records are maintained of all equipment and furniture stolen, irreparably damaged or unaccounted for, but they do no invariably distinguish between these losses where the sums involved are small. Within these limits, the information you have requested is shown below. You may, however, like to note that a large number of the items included in the Damaged or Unaccounted For column are small items of cutlery etc of little intrinsic value.

Numbers of items:		*Total*	*Individual items valued at*
Stolen	*Damaged or unaccounted for*	value	over £5000
79	1,960	149,448	(1) Victaulic pipe (£41,049) (2) 110v power tools (£10,143) (3) Night vision Goggles (£13,438 (4) Digital master unit (£9,151)

Included in the above are three items of IT equipment with a total value of £5243, which have all been stolen.

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from I. G. McIntyre to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence/Her Majesty's Government about the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that have been stolen or are otherwise unaccounted for during the last 12 months, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Dental Agency.

Equipment and furniture lost or unaccounted for with the Defence Dental Agency is listed below:

(a) Miscellaneous Medical/Dental Equipment items x 32 = £2561.87

(b) Information Technology Material = £ NIL

I hope this is of help.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply, on behalf of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), to your question asking for information about property stolen or otherwise unaccounted for during the last twelve months.

DERA procedures identify two categories of equipment, items valued at more than £10,000 and items valued at less than £10,000. The responsibility for maintaining registers, safeguarding equipment and investigating any losses relating to items valued at less than £10,000 is devolved to a working level. There are more than 600 such registers kept within DERA. Items valued at more than £10,000 are recorded centrally, are routinely checked and any loss or damage investigation is notified centrally.

No items valued at £10,000 or more have been reported centrally as lost, stolen or damaged during the past twelve months. Because of the devolved nature of the records held on equipment valued at less than £10,000 it has not been possible to collect this information in the time available.

I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful on this occasion.

Letter from Ron Smith to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the loss of equipment and furniture by Defence Agencies as this matter, in respect of the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA), falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the DSCA.

In the DSCA there were, in the last twelve months, 355 items unaccounted for to a total value of £11,644; of these, it is believed none were stolen. In addition, there were three items of IT equipment unaccounted for (total value £2,200) and six IT items which we believe were individually valued at £5K or over.

Letter from W. E. Speadbury to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

In the absence on duty of the Chief Executive, I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that have been stolen and are otherwise unaccounted for during the past 12 months.

I am pleased to report that during this period no equipment or furniture has been stolen or is otherwise unaccounted for.

Letter from F. A. Bush to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, about stolen and unaccounted for equipment and furniture, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Acting Chief Executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Executive Agency.

During the last 12 months, we have identified the loss of 97 International Standards Organisation (ISO) containers, which are missing following operations over the past 4 years in the former Republic of Yugoslavia. Their value is approximately £174K and within this total there are 7 refrigerated containers, each valued at £5000 or more.

Letter from B. E. Nimick to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that have either been stolen or otherwise unaccounted for as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Medical Supplies Agency.

No such equipment or furniture has been reported stolen or unaccounted for over the past 12 months.

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that have been stolen or unaccounted for during the last 12 months, as this falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office.

The type and value of equipment and furniture stolen from the Meteorological Office in the last year is as follows:

Dell Pentium PC and network card valued at £2,000

HP Laserjet 5 printer valued at £3,000

Dell PC valued at £1,500

Laptop stolen from employees' care valued at £2,000.

No other items are unaccounted for.

I hope this gives you the information you need.

Letter from Mr. S. R. Hill to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 February 1997:

1. I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that (a) have been stolen and (b) are otherwise unaccounted for during the past 12 months, as this matter falls within my area of repsonsibility as Chief Executive of the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation (NARO).

2. Four items only have been stolen, amounting to a total value of £294.23.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times in each of the past five years the royal yacht has been used for private journeys; where and by whom these journeys were made; and what payment for each voyage was received. [16911]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* During the past five years, Her Majesty's yacht Britannia has been used for private journeys on the following occasions:

Dates	*Embarked*	*From/to*
6–18 August 1992	The Queen The Duke of Edinburgh The Duke of York The Princess Royal The Prince Edward	Portsmouth/Aberdeen
5—16 August 1993	The Queen The Duke of Edinburgh The Duke of York The Princess Royal The Prince Edward	Portsmouth/Aberdeen
1994	nil	
3–14 August 1995	The Queen The Duke of Edinburgh The Prince Edward	Portsmouth/Aberdeen
7–17 August 1996	The Queen The Duke of Edinburgh The Princess Royal Captain Timothy Laurence	Portsmouth/Aberdeen

The voyage in August 1995 included an official visit by Her Majesty the Queen to Oban. The voyage in August 1996 included an official visit by Her Majesty the Queen to Stranraer. Provision for HMY Britannia is currently made from defence votes, and payments are not made by individual users. Following the Government's decision to commission a replacement for Britannia, the Queen has indicated that she and other members of the royal family wish to make repayment on a basis to be agreed for any personal use made of the new royal yacht.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rules govern whether a voyage made by the royal yacht is official or private. [16890]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* Official voyages by HMY Britannia include public duties, both royal and commercial, and her regular activities such as training. Private voyages are any that do not include public duties.

HEALTH

Waiting Times

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each quarter since March 1988 the mean and median waiting times for *(a)* in-patient admission to hospital, *(b)* day case treatment and *(c)* all admissions from waiting lists to hospital in England. [15446]

Mr. Horam: Estimated mean and median waiting times for patients waiting for treatment on an in-patient or day case basis and for all patients waiting at the end of each quarter since March 1988 are given in the table.

Estimated mean and median waiting times of patients on waiting lists for elective admission

NHS hospitals, England *Figures shown in days*

Financial year	Position on last day of	Ordinary admissions Mean	Ordinary admissions Median	Day cases Mean	Day cases Median	All cases Mean	All cases Median
1987–88	March 1988	295	164	219	96	281	153
1988–89	June 1988	300	168	217	101	285	156
	September 1988	302	171	219	103	287	158
	December 1988	298	169	218	98	283	156
	March 1989	300	170	217	97	284	156
1989–90	June 1989	294	166	217	96	278	152
	September 1989	294	166	214	98	277	153
	December 1989	285	161	212	95	269	147
	March 1990	279	159	205	90	263	144
1990–91	June 1990	276	159	202	94	260	145
	September 1990	273	160	196	91	256	145
	December 1990	257	152	189	87	242	137
	March 1991	248	151	172	85	230	135
1991–92	June 1991	247	151	173	85	229	133
	September 1991	237	145	178	84	222	128
	December 1991	211	131	150	80	195	114
	March 1992	170	116	119	75	197	97
1992–93	June 1992	166	122	121	79	153	105
	September 1992	163	121	121	80	151	104
	December 1992	157	116	119	78	145	99
	March 1993	149	114	115	79	138	97
1993–94	June 1993	156	122	120	82	144	105
	September 1993	158	123	124	82	146	105
	December 1993	158	122	125	82	146	104
	March 1994	151	116	122	82	140	98
1994–95	June 1994	154	120	122	83	141	102
	September 1994	152	119	121	82	139	99
	December 1994	147	112	117	80	134	92
	March 1995	134	101	108	76	122	86
1995–96	June 1995	136	107	110	79	124	90
	September 1995	134	104	107	77	122	87
	December 1995	130	98	104	76	118	85
	March 1996	122	94	99	74	111	83
1996–97	June 1996	127	100	105	78	116	86
	September 1996	130	100	106	78	118	86

Note:
Ordinary cases are those involving an overnight stay.
Source:
Korner aggregate returns submitted from providers of hospital services in the NHS.

Lariam

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *284*, what research trials of Lariam have been carried out by *(a)* drug companies and *(b)* other bodies since 1990; and if the Medicines Control Agency has reviewed the results of those trials since that date. [17207]

Mr. Malone: As stated in my reply of 13 February, information on research trials held by the Licensing Authority is confidential. The Medicines Control Agency evaluates the results of studies and other relevant data.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the contracts awarded by his

Department to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersens, *(c)* BMI, *(d)* Capita and *(e)* Sema since 1992, and the broad function to be carried out by the contractor and the value of the contract in each case. [17613]

Mr. Horam: Information regarding the numbers and nature of contracts awarded by this Department could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The total sums paid to those suppliers listed are as follows:

	1992–93 £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	*1995–96* £	*1996–97* £
EDS	nil	nil	nil	nil	13,029.21
Andersens	nil	nil	nil	36,783.87	293.75
BMI	nil	78.40	246.75	nil	4.389.50
Capita	37,653.81	62,971.10	29,789.51	1,815.38	71,468.26
Sema	nil	9,213.18	52,628.25	27,927.40	nil

Figures for 1991–92 can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Local Authority Social Services

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria he uses to assess the performance of local authority social services departments; if he will publish a list of social services departments ranked by their performance according to these criteria; and if he will make a statement. [17671]

Mr. Burns: We recently published "Better Value For Money in Social Services", a national overview of trends and costs in social services in England over the last decade or so. Copies are available in the Library. This report, together with other published data, should assist local authorities to assess their own efficiency to ensure their services give value for money. We do not define centrally criteria which would form a basis for the performance of individual social services departments to be measured and ranked. Performance indicators for all services provided by local authorities are published annually by the Audit Commission.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy in respect of public inquiries into the actions of social services departments in alleged cases of child neglect; and if he will make a statement. [17663]

Mr. Burns: Section 81 of the Children Act 1989 provides that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may cause an inquiry to be held into any matter connected with the social services committee of a local authority, in so far as those functions relate to children. Section 84 of the Children Act provides that if my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is satisfied that a local authority has failed, without reasonable excuse, to comply with any of the duties imposed under the Children Act, he may make an order declaring the authority to be in default with respect to that duty. The order may contain directions for the purpose of ensuring that the duty is complied with. It is unlikely that it would be appropriate to use section 84 to investigate an individual's case.

Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 requires local authorities to act under the general guidance of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the exercise of their social services functions. The guidance called "Working Together under the Children Act 1989" was issued under section 7. Part 8 of that guidance requires that, whenever an individual case involves an incident leading to the death of a child where child abuse is confirmed or suspected, or a child protection issue likely to be of major public concern arises, there should be an individual review by each agency and a composite review by the area child protection committee.

Dental Services (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified dentists provide national health service dental treatment in the London borough of Wandsworth. [17590]

Mr. Malone: One hundred and sixty-three dentists with practices in the London borough of Wandsworth were on the health authority list at 31 December 1996. This covers principal dentists, their assistants and vocational trainees.

District Health Authorities (Purchasing)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the purchasing plans of district health authorities for 1997–98. [17680]

Mr. Malone: Regional offices of the national health service executive assess the purchasing plans of health authorities for consistency with national policies and priorities for the NHS, in the light of local needs and circumstances.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring his Department has undertaken of the purchasing policies of district health authorities. [17681]

Mr. Malone: Regional offices of the national health service executive manage health authorities' performance to ensure progress against national policies and priorities for the NHS, in the light of local circumstances.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to lift the ban on relatives of CJD victims being blood donors. [17543]

Mr. Horam: There are no plans to alter the national blood service guidelines which exclude relatives of people who have suffered from Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease from giving blood. This exclusion is in line with Council of Europe guidelines. I should emphasise, however, that this is a precautionary measure only. There is no epidemiological evidence of transmission of CJD through blood or blood products.

Influenza Immunisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 24 February, *Official Report,*

columns 73–74, (1) what percentage of those suffering from *(a)* chronic respiratory disease, *(b)* chronic heart disease, *(c)* kidney failure, *(d)* diabetes and *(e)* diseases and treatment suppressing the immune system were immunised against influenza in the last three years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement; [17925]

(2) what percentage of those in long-term residential care were vaccinated against influenza in each of the last three years for which figures are available; [17927]

(3) what percentage of *(a)* nursing homes and *(b)* residential homes had their residents immunised against influenza in each of the last years for which figures are available. [17922]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally. The recommendations for influenza immunisation broadly outline the underlying diseases which put people at risk of serious illness should they develop influenza. However, it is ultimately for the clinical judgment of the doctor concerned whether to offer vaccine to an individual patient. The doctor will take into account the likelihood of that patient developing a complication of influenza such as pneumonia, or of their underlying disease being aggravated, as in asthma. They will vary between patients. General practitioners are recommended to identify their patients who are likely to need influenza immunisation and order the vaccine as necessary; they are encouraged to increase the uptake of immunisation in their areas each year. Immunisation requirements for people in long-term residential care and nursing homes are determined locally.

General Practitioners

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of *(a)* general practitioners as a whole, *(b)* general practitioner fundholders, *(c)* general practitioner non-fundholders, *(d)* equity partners, *(e)* non-equity partners, *(f)* salaried assistants and *(g)* general practitioner registrars in vocational training were (i) male and (ii) female in each of the last five years. [17929]

Mr. Malone: The information requested has been placed in the Library. Information is not available on equity and non-equity partners.

Hospital Travel Costs Scheme

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* the number of claims received anc *(b)* the average fare reimbursed per claim under the hospital travel costs scheme in the most recent year for which figures are available. [17913]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Elderly Care Costs

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the costs to local authorities of *(a)* care assessment and (b) care management for services for elderly people for each year since 1989–90 for which information is available. [17824]

Mr. Burns: For 1994–95, the latest year for which information is available, the figures of total local authority expenditure on care assessment/care management for elderly people may be found in table 6 of the statistical bulletin "Personal Social Services current and capital expenditure in England: 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library. Separate data on care assessment and care management, and expenditure data for these services for elderly people in earlier years are not available.

Food Poisoning

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many laboratory reports of salmonella in foodstuffs were provided to the public health laboratory service in England and Wales in each year since the introduction of the new reporting system; what is the number to date in 1997; and if he will make a statement. [17653]

Mr. Horam: The figures are given in the following table.

Salmonella
England and Wales annual totals—human food isolates

Year	*Total*
1991	1,937
1992	1,098
1993	859
1994	2,076
1995	981
1996	1,002
1997[1]	69

Source:
Public Health Laboratory Service—Laboratory of Enteric Pathogens.

Notes:
[1] Up to 21 February.

1. Salmonella figures encompass the identification of salmonellas from samples taken by environmental health officers as part of their routine inspection and sampling procedures and salmonellas found in foodstuffs sampled in structured food surveys and also salmonellas identified in foodstuffs investigated following an outbreak of clinical illness.

2. The new reporting system was introduced in January 1992 when data from the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre and the Central Public Health Laboratory were combined to produce the PHLS Salmonella Common Data Set and also when the new outbreak reporting system for gastro-intestinal disease commenced. Neither of these could have changed practices in relation to laboratory reports on Salmonella in foodstuffs.

3. The figures cover isolates referred to the Laboratory of Enteric Pathogens by both PHLS and non-PHLS laboratories for confirmation and typing.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many laboratory reports of *(a)* E. coli and *(b)* listeria in foodstuffs were provided to the public health laboratory service in England and Wales in each year since 1979. [17654]

Mr. Horam: The figures are given in the following table:

Listeria monocytogenes and escherichia coli 0157
England and Wales annual totals
Human food isolates

Year	*Listeria monocytogenes*[1]	*VT producing E. coli 0157*
1979	0	—
1980	0	—
1981	0	—
1982	0	—
1983	0	—
1984	0	—
1985	0	—
1986	2	—
1987	473	—
1988	639	—
1989	1,405	—
1990	1,193	—
1991	1,621	0
1992	445	13
1993	467	8
1994	507	18
1995	350	13
1996	349	78
1997[2]	3	0

Source:
Public Health Laboratory Service.

Notes:
[1] Figures include isolates referred to the PHLS by non-PHLS laboratories.
[2] Figures on Listeria monocytogenes are up to 24 February, figures on Verocytotoxin-producing E. coli 0157 are up to 21 February.
1. Surveys of cheeses and pate were undertaken in the late 1980s and early 1990s to assess the problems of contamination and have been repeated in more recent years to assess the improvements in the microbiological quality of such foodstuffs.
2. The first human isolation of E. coli 0157 in England and Wales was made in 1982 and no food isolation was made by the PHLS until 1992.

Hospitals (Military Personnel)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent medically qualified military personnel are used in NHS hospitals. [16230]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Defence Secondary Care Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. Ron Smith to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 27 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the extent to which medically qualified military personnel are used in the NHS as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA).

Amongst the hospitals which comprise the DSCA, three Ministry of Defence Hospital Units (MDHUs) at Peterborough, Frimley Park near Camberley and Derriford, Plymouth are situated in NHS Trust hospitals. The MDHUs and their military staff are not separate from the civilian hospitals but fully integrated in the day-to-day business of patient care. A total of 504 medically qualified staff work in the MDHUs. In addition, a further 90 military medical personnel from the DSCA and other parts of the Defence Medical Services are currently seconded to NHS hospitals for specialist training.

WALES

Fiscal Deficit and Government Expenditure

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the fiscal deficit in Wales for the most recent year available; [17866]

(2) what was the gross Government expenditure in Wales broken down into *(a)* identifiable, *(b)* unidentifiable and *(c)* other expenditure in the last year for which figures are available. [17872]

Mr. Hague: The latest available information for Wales is shown in the tables:

The "fiscal deficit" in Wales and the UK, 1994–95

	Wales	*United Kingdom*	*Wales as percentage of UK*
General Government expenditure (£ billion)	15.6	295.5	5.3
General Government revenue (£ billion)	9.9	247.6	4.0
General Government borrowing requirement (£ billion)	5.7	47.9	11.9
GGBR as percentage of GDP	20	7	

Source:
Government Expenditure and Revenue—Wales, 1994–95.

General Government expenditure in Wales and the UK, 1994–95

	Wales		*United Kingdom*		*Wales as percentage of UK*
	£ billion	*Percentage share of GGE*	*£ billion*	*Percentage share of GGE*	
(i) Identifiable	12.3	78.7	219.6	74.3	5.6
of which:					
Welsh Office	6.4	41.1			
Social Security	5.1	32.9	89.2	30.2	
(ii) Non-identifiable (estimated)	1.7	11.2	40.2	13.6	4.4
(iii) Other (estimated)	1.6	10.1	35.7	12.1	4.4
of which:					
Debt interest	1.0	6.3	22.5	7.6	
Total GGE (excluding privatisation proceeds)	15.6	100.0	295.5	100.0	5.3
Privatisation proceeds	–0.3		–6.3		4.2
Total GGE (including privatisation proceeds)	15.3		289.2		5.3
GDP (1994)					4.2
Population (1994)					5.0

Source:
Government Expenditure and Revenue—Wales, 1994–95.

Tax

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much tax was raised in Wales broken down by *(a)* income tax, *(b)* VAT, *(c)* corporation tax and *(d)* other tax in the last year for which figures are available. [17873]

Mr. Hague: The latest available information for Wales is shown in the table:

The estimate for corporation tax, which is not shown separately in the table, is £924 million.

Estimated General Government Receipts in Wales 1994–95

	United Kingdom £ billion	*Welsh estimates £ billion*	*Estimated share of UK Per cent.*
Income tax	63.1	2.2	3.5
Social security contributions	42.1	1.8	4.2
Value added tax	41.8	1.7	4.1
Local authority revenues	22.4	0.6	2.9
All other revenues	78.2	3.5	4.5
Total	247.6	9.9	4.0

Source:
Government Expenditure and Revenue—Wales, 1994–95.

Motorways

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many kilometres of motorway are currently *(a)* open, *(b)* under construction, *(c)* planned in Wales, (i) as new motorway or (ii) as existing motorway being widened. [17275]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Some 126 km of M4 motorway is open; no new motorway is under construction; The M4 Magor-Coldra widening has been completed, although final surfacing is to be carried out in April; 24.2 km of new motorway is planned; 12.7 km of existing motorway is to be widened.

Council House Sales

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money has been raised from the sale of council houses in Wales since 1979; what percentage of this money is still held in reserve by local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [17132]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: At 31 March 1996, the total amount raised by local authorities from the sale of council houses since the inception of the right to buy scheme in 1981 was £993 million. It is not possible from local authority returns to separate the amounts held in reserve from the sale of council houses from other capital receipts held in the housing revenue account. Capital receipts held in the housing revenue account at 31 March 1996, both set aside against credit liabilities and usable–as defined in section 60 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989—totalled £246 million.

Meningitis

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the recent outbreak of meningitis C in Nefyn, Gwynedd. [17592]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend and I are aware of the two cases of meningococcal septicaemia in Nefyn Gwynedd, whether appropriate control measures have been adopted by North Wales health authority to prevent the further spread of infection.

Prescriptions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, columns *91–92*, how many investigations are currently proceeding in each health authority into allegations of transfer by multiple pharmacies from one pharmacy for processing in another health authority to maximise payments of professional allowances. [17921]

Mr. Hague: Inquiries made of health authorities in Wales indicate that one such investigation is under way.

Influenza Immunisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what percentage of *(a)* nursing homes and *(b)* residential homes had their residents immunised against influenza in each of the last three years for which figures are available; [17923]

(2) what percentage of those suffering from *(a)* chronic respiratory disease, *(b)* chronic heart disease, *(c)* kidney failure, *(d)* diabetes and *(e)* diseases and treatment suppressing the immune system were immunised against influenza in the last three years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement; [17924]

(3) what percentage of those in long-term residential care were vaccinated against influenza in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [17926]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not held centrally.

General Practitioners

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sole practitioner GPs there were in the Welsh NHS in each of the last five years; and what proportion they constituted of the aggregate GP work force in Wales. [17914]

Mr. Hague: The information is shown in the table:

	Single handed practitioners	*Percentage of unrestricted principles who are single handed*
October 1992	126	7.5
October 1993	129	7.6
October 1994	130	7.6
October 1995	130	7.6
March 1996	129	7.5

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the relative outcomes of treatments carried out by GPs in group practice who (i) have and (ii) do not have personal lists. [17917]

Mr. Hague: While there are a number of research projects in primary care, there are none which address this topic.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of *(a)* general practitioners as a whole, *(b)* general practitioner fundholders, *(c)* general practitioner non-fundholders, *(d)* equity partners, *(e)* non-equity partners, *(f)* salaried assistants and *(g)* general practitioner registrars in vocational training were (i) male and (ii) female in each of the last five years. [17928]

Mr. Hague: This information is shown in the table. Data for general practitioner fundholders and non-fundholders are not centrally available by gender.

Percentage

	Total GPs[1]		*Equity partners*		*Non-equity partners*		*Assistants*		*Trainees*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
October 1992	77.4	22.6	79.4	20.6	60.0	40.0	54.2	45.8	57.9	42.1
October 1993	76.3	23.7	78.5	21.5	36.4	63.6	50.0	50.0	55.6	44.4
October 1994	74.4	25.6	76.7	23.3	55.6	44.4	45.0	55.0	47.5	52.5
October 1995	74.4	25.6	75.9	24.1	58.3	41.7	60.0	40.0	54.8	45.2
March 1996	73.1	26.9	75.3	24.7	70.0	30.0	40.7	59.3	43.6	56.4

[1] Unrestricted principals, restricted principals, assistants and trainees.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of general practitioners in group practices maintained personal lists in each of the last five years; and what proportion this was of the aggregate general practitioner work force. [17918]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not held centrally.

European Summit (Cardiff)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State of Wales what arrangements he has made with the Cardiff county council for assistance with refurbishment works at *(a)* Cardiff city hall, *(b)* Cardiff Central station and *(c)* other areas of essential infrastructure in preparation for the European summit conference in June 1998; and if he will make a statement. [17915]

Mr. Hague: I have allocated under the Welsh capital challenge scheme £1.5 million to Cardiff county council for the refurbishment of the city hall as well as a further £2 million for improvements to Cardiff central square. My officials are in discussions with the county council about these and other projects which will improve the city centre for the European Council in June 1998.

SCOTLAND

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for the collection of data and in formulas for the distribution of grants and awards; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14807]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

Collection of data:

Postcodes are used for collating data in the following cases:

- compilation of the Scottish Register of Employment, a register of manufacturing units in Scotland with 11 or more employees;
- analysis of further education college students by geographical origin—eg Scottish, rest of UK;
- as a building block by general register office in the collection of statistics on vital events and in the census of population.

In general, statistical surveys conducted by the Scottish Office will incorporate post code units as a geographic indicator. These will be used primarily to aggregate the data into higher order statistics—eg local authorities.

Distribution of grants:

For the purpose of rural grant schemes, the definition of rural Scotland relies to some extent on post code sectors. The definition is used with the proviso that people can still apply for grants if their locality is distinctly rural even if, by the arbitrary application of post codes, their area is classed as urban. Rural grants schemes are currently under review.

Although support to local authorities is not distributed on the basis of postcode areas, some limited data, originally collected by other departments and agencies by postcode area and then aggregated to local authority units by the Scottish Office, are used in the calculation of certain grant-aided expenditure assessments. Such processes are continually reviewed by the Department and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Motorways

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many kilometres of motorway are currently *(a)* open, *(b)* under construction and *(c)* planned in Scotland (i) as new motorway and (ii) as existing motorway being widened. [17267]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In Scotland, 4[illegible] kilometres of motorway are open, 2 kilometres are under construction, 79 kilometres of new motorway are planned and 2 kilometres of existing motorway are planned to be widened.

Road Markings and Signposting

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to improve road markings and signposting; and if he will make a statement. [17362]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The placing and maintenance of road signs and markings is the responsibility of the traffic authority—in Scotland, the local traffic authority for local roads, and the Scottish Office Development Department on behalf of the Secretary of State for Scotland for trunk roads and motorways. The signs and markings used are required to conform with regulations, principally the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions—TSRGD—1994, made jointly by the Secretaries of State for Transport, for Scotland and for Wales, or to be specially authorised by the Secretary of State. The Department of Transport is currently preparing a statutory instrument to amend the TSRGD to include new sign designs in response to changing traffic management needs and techniques. Work is also in hand to update the joint guidance published by the three Departments on the correct design and use of signs.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review the financial memorandums which govern the payments made to owners and occupiers of SSSI's who have notified Scottish Natural Heritage of intent to damage an SSSI, to ensure greater value for money. [17489]

Mr. Kynoch: The Government plan to issue a consultation paper on a Great Britain basis later this year on possible changes to the financial guidelines for management agreements in SSSIs.

Electronic Tagging

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the expenditure on electronic tagging in Scotland to date. [17692]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There has been no expenditure on electronic tagging in Scotland. Expenditure on pilot projects will not commence until such time as the relevant provisions of the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill have been enacted.

Holocaust Denial

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the policy of the Lord Advocate in respect of the prosecution of holocaust denial material. [17540]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate informs me that he has no policy specifically directed to the prosecution of holocaust denial material. In relation to any police reports containing allegations of holocaust denial, the Crown will follow the same approach as it does with other allegations of criminal conduct. The decision whether to take proceedings, and the nature of any proceedings, will be determined by an assessment of the available evidence and the public interest, having regard to the whole circumstances of the offence. Proceedings could be taken only where there is sufficient evidence that (1) the person who published or distributed the "holocaust denial material" intended thereby to stir up racial hatred or, having regard to all the circumstances, racial hatred was likely to be stirred up thereby, and (2) the material was threatening, abusive or insulting.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many prosecutions relating to holocaust denial material there have been in Scotland in each year since 1979; [17541]

(2) how many prosecutions there have been for incitement to racial hatred in Scotland since 1979. [17542]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate informs me that the information requested is not available.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Written Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Lord President of the Council (1), pursuant to his answer of 18 February, *Official Report*, columns *535–36*, if he will list the reasons for the records on the costs of answering parliamentary questions not being retained; and if he will make a statement; [17593]

(2), pursuant to his oral answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column 1054, if he will list the 10 questions which cost the most to answer since 1989; which hon. Members asked them; and what was the cost. [17594]

Mr. Newton: There is no arrangement for systematically estimating the cost of answering every individual parliamentary question.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 28 February 1997

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

South Africa

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding the importing of South African goods; and what plans he has to assist South African industries to expand their world trade. [17712]

Dr. Liam Fox: Negotiations are in progress between the European Commission and the South African Government on South Africa's qualified accession to the Lomé convention and on a possible free trade agreement. The British Government are pressing for swift progress on this issue and have made it clear that they support the most liberal agreement possible. Representations in support of a generous line towards South Africa have been received from numerous members of the British public and from interested organisations.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings he has had in the last year to discuss housing and employment problems in South Africa. [17713]

Dr. Fox: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has not, in the last year, held meetings to address these specific issues. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has, however, had numerous meetings both in Britain and in South Africa, to discuss South Africa's development needs. Housing is not one of the five agreed priorities for the British aid programme, but our high commission in Pretoria has funded projects assisting with housing. The British development division in South Africa is also helping with small enterprise development and job creation.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Voluntary Bodies

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the total funding given by central Government Departments to voluntary bodies in the financial year 1994–95; and if she will make a statement. [18467]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Central Government funding of voluntary organisations in 1994–95, including grants from non-departmental public bodies, amounted to £3,453 million. Of this, £2,496 million was payments to housing associations. The remaining £957 million went direct to voluntary organisations to support the provision of services and a wide range of activities and projects, an increase in Government funding of 5 per cent. in cash terms and 3 per cent. in real terms over the level of provision in 1993–94.

The amount spent by each Department in 1994–95 with comparative figures for 1993–94 was as follows:

Department	*1994–95 £,000*	*1993–94 £,000*
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries	267	242
Crown Prosecution Service	20	20
Ministry of Defence	18,046	18,919
Department for Education and Employment		
Direct	59,574	
(Education)		5,908
(Employment)		50,057
Equal Opportunities Commission	26	38
Total—DfEE	59,600	56,003
Department of Environment		
Direct	40,621	27,981
Countryside Commission	4,000	4,178
English Nature	1,3000	804
Housing Corporation	2,068,000	2,510,000
Rural Development Commission	4,000	4,744
Urban Development Corporation	10,600	11,036
Urban Programme	13,900	28,306
English Partnerships	1,000	
Housing Action Trusts	565	625
Total—DoE	2,143,986	2,587,674
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	1,043	1,011
Department of Health		
Direct	52,576	49,434
Alcohol and Drug Misuse	2,400	2,300
Health Education Authority		1,250
Total—DH	54,976	52,984
Home Office		
Direct	61,043	59,205
Commission for Racial Equality	4,855	5,213
Probation Partnership Funding	3,582	2,210
Total—Home Office	69,481	66,628
Lord Chancellor's Department		
Direct	163	183
Legal Aid Board	1,074	942
Total—LCD	1,237	1,125
Department of National Heritage		
Direct	18,057	15,855
Sports Council	17,814	20,219
Arts Council for Great Britain		213,661
Arts Council for England	172,056	
English Tourist Board	26	27
British Tourist Authority	3	3
Total—DNH	207,956	249,764
Northern Ireland Office		
Direct	85,662	85,768
Housing Associations	44,879	49,293
Sports Council for Northern Ireland	626	728
Youth Council for Northern Ireland	1,471	1,421
Arts Council for Northern Ireland	3,318	3,603

Department	1994–95 £,000	1993–94 £,000
Northern Ireland Adult Education Centre	32	
Northern Ireland Museums Council		
Rural Development Commission	348	176
Total—NIO	136,337	140,990
Overseas Development Administration	185,114	158,450
Scottish Office		
Direct grants	25,582	24,231
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	1,241	1,075
Housing Associations	268,540	273,302
Mental Illness Specific Grant	8,680	5,142
Scottish National Heritage	3,434	2,900
Sports Council for Scotland	2,082	1,898
Urban Programme	60,460	48,062
Scottish Arts Council	24,477	
Total—Scottish Office	394,496	356,610
Department of Social Security	18,857	13,110
Department of Trade and Industry	13,888	14,435
Department of Transport	368	422
Welsh Office	13,773	14,071
Direct	148	285
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	617	575
Development Board for Rural Wales	1,548	1,603
Flexible Community Care	114,556	122,082
Housing for Wales (Tia Cymru)	1,912	1,645
Sports Council for Wales	8,500	
Arts Council for Wales	397	398
Welsh Development Agency	177	287
Welsh Tourist Board	5,711	
Strategic Development Scheme		1,706
(Rural Initiative)		4,632
(Urban Programme)		
Total—Welsh Office	147,339	147,283
Total		
Direct grants	594,655	539,301
Indirect Grants (excluding housing)	362,381	371,691
Housing	2,495,975	2,954,677
Total: All expenditure	3,453,011	3,865,669

The 1994–95 figures include some data which have not been collected in past years. In order to provide a year-on-year comparison, similar data have also been obtained for 1993–94 and the figures for 1993–94 contained in the reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) given by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Home Department on 19 July 1995,—*Official Report*, columns *1445–47* have been updated in the table.

In the case of indirect grants—payments by Government Departments to intermediary bodies, for distribution by them—end recipients are understood to be voluntary organisations in most but not necessarily all cases; and some of the expenditure may be used by the intermediary body in administering grant applications and payments.

I am also placing in the Libraries of both Houses reports further analysing Government grants to voluntary organisations in 1994–95 and 1993–94.

Television Licences (Pensioners)

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of the cost of providing free television licences for old age pensioners in Wales. [17877]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* I understand that the cost of providing free television licences for all old age pensioners in Wales would be likely to be in the order of £30 million a year.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people *(a)* were assessed under, *(b)* failed and *(c)* passed the habitual residence test in each month since August 1994 in each of the Newham benefit offices broken down by (i) United Kingdom, (ii) European Economic Area and (iii) other; [17831]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown of the habitual residence test in the London borough of Newham since August 1994 for (i) Canning Town, (ii) Plaistow and (iii) Stratford benefit offices. [17833]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 27 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking how many people (a) were assessed (b) failed and (c) passed the Habitual Residence Test (HRT) in each month since August 1994 in each of the Newham Benefit offices broken down by (i) United Kingdom, (ii) EEA and (iii) other and; if he will provide a breakdown of the HRT in the London Borough of Newham since August 1994 for (i) Canning Town, (ii) Plaistow and (iii) Stratford benefit offices.

Benefits Agency (BA) statistics are collated at District level and not routinely by individual office. However the BA District of Newham, which includes the offices at Canning Town, Plaistow and Stratford, do maintain HRT statistics for individual offices to assist in the deployment of staff resources.

The information is shown in the attached tables. The same level of information may not be available for all benefits and it will not be possible to obtain comparable data for every District.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Stratford office—habitual residence test

Income support	EEA citizens Pass	EEA citizens Fail	UK citizens Pass	UK citizens Fail	Other citizens Pass	Other citizens Fail
August 1994	0	5	0	0	1	0
September 1994	1	20	0	0	0	0
October 1994	0	20	0	0	0	0
November 1994	13	29	0	0	0	0
December 1994	5	10	8	15	13	3
January 1995	3	6	6	4	11	3
February 1995	6	8	8	10	11	5
March 1995	4	9	6	3	11	2
April 1995	5	4	8	2	5	3
May 1995	4	4	18	2	11	8
June 1995	5	6	12	3	15	14
July 1995	6	4	32	19	17	10
August 1995	10	7	30	7	14	12
September 1995	5	7	17	11	14	4
October 1995	10	7	32	9	19	5
November 1995	17	3	26	4	19	0

Stratford office—habitual residence test

Income support	EEA citizens Pass	EEA citizens Fail	UK citizens Pass	UK citizens Fail	Other citizens Pass	Other citizens Fail
December 1995	9	5	7	2	6	1
January 1996	6	7	14	9	10	2
February 1996	5	9	21	9	18	2
March 1996	6	14	21	6	11	3
April 1996	2	11	22	18	11	2
May 1996	5	3	24	13	11	3
June 1996	4	4	27	12	14	2
July 1996	4	1	23	11	8	7
August 1996	8	5	13	16	12	5
September 1996	5	5	22	12	9	2
October 1996	9	6	16	16	11	2
November 1996	6	2	9	7	20	2
December 1996	3	0	4	2	5	1
January 1997	1	1	4	1	5	1

Data are provisional and may be subject to change.

Plaistow office—habitual residence test

Income support	EEA citizens Pass	EEA citizens Fail	UK citizens Pass	UK citizens Fail	Other citizens Pass	Other citizens Fail
August 1994	0	0	0	0	0	0
September 1994	0	12	2	3	1	0
October 1994	1	10	2	10	5	0
November 1994	5	12	7	9	8	2
December 1994	2	3	8	4	2	1
January 1995	0	3	15	3	5	0
February 1995	3	7	20	4	17	1
March 1995	8	7	24	6	14	6
April 1995	1	1	28	4	15	0
May 1995	3	4	34	3	18	2
June 1995	1	2	37	0	13	2
July 1995	1	2	54	7	25	0
August 1995	2	3	43	0	18	0
September 1995	3	5	53	7	19	5
October 1995	8	6	25	6	21	2
November 1995	4	4	20	6	5	0
December 1995	1	8	10	3	9	4
January 1996	12	5	3	3	15	5
February 1996	7	6	17	6	12	4
March 1996	13	10	21	6	5	3
April 1996	7	5	10	5	6	0
May 1996	4	12	12	5	2	2
June 1996	2	2	13	5	8	1
July 1996	1	2	27	2	11	2
August 1996	5	3	17	10	13	0
September 1996	4	2	16	11	7	3
October 1996	10	5	21	6	11	0
November 1996	8	5	10	4	7	2
December 1996	3	0	8	2	2	1
January 1997	4	0	8	1	5	0

Data are provisional and may be subject to change.

Canning Town office—habitual residence test

Income support	EEA citizens Pass	EEA citizens Fail	UK citizens Pass	UK citizens Fail	Other citizens Pass	Other citizens Fail
August 1994	0	5	5	1	2	0
September 1994	0	2	5	5	1	0
October 1994	0	2	11	8	1	2
November 1994	0	2	6	3	1	1
December 1994	0	3	4	7	1	0
January 1995	2	0	9	1	0	0
February 1995	2	2	14	4	1	2
March 1995	2	1	13	1	4	1
April 1995	0	0	4	2	2	0
May 1995	0	2	5	5	3	1
June 1995	1	1	14	3	2	1
July 1995	1	0	10	4	3	1
August 1995	1	0	10	1	4	0
September 1995	0	0	8	2	1	0
October 1995	1	2	4	1	0	1
November 1995	3	1	0	4	0	0
December 1995	1	2	1	1	0	1
January 1996	0	2	4	2	2	1
February 1996	1	0	0	2	0	0
March 1996	1	0	7	2	1	1
April 1996	0	0	1	0	0	1
May 1996	6	2	7	1	1	2

Canning Town office—habitual residence test

Income support	EEA citizens Pass	EEA citizens Fail	UK citizens Pass	UK citizens Fail	Other citizens Pass	Other citizens Fail
June 1996	3	4	6	5	2	5
July 1996	0	0	4	2	0	0
August 1996	1	1	9	0	0	2
September 1996	0	3	7	5	1	1
October 1996	2	0	2	0	0	0
November 1996	0	0	5	0	0	0
December 1996	1	1	0	0	0	0
January 1997	1	0	1	0	2	0

Data are provisional and may be subject to change.

Housing and Council Tax Benefits

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to allow local authorities to contract out housing benefit and council tax benefit. [18484]

Mr. Roger Evans: I announced on 12 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *196*, my intention to open consultation with the local authority associations on a proposal to bring forward an order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 which would allow contractors to carry out housing and council tax benefit determinations. Existing legislation prevents contractors from making benefit determinations and reduces the efficiency of contracts which local authorities are able to negotiate. Following consultation with the local authority associations, I am laying before Parliament today the Contracting Out (Functions of Local Authorities in relation to Income-related Benefits) Order 1997. The order will allow contractors to carry out the bulk of housing and council tax benefits administration, including benefit determinations. However, some functions relating to claims for central Government subsidy, overpayments, prosecutions, discretionary payments and appeals will be reserved for local authorities.

War Pensions

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what requests he has received to make an oral statement to the House on recent developments in relation to sensorineural hearing loss and war pensions; and if he will make a statement. [17895]

Mr. Lilley: On 5 December 1996, my right hon. and noble Friend Lord MacKay of Ardbredknish announced to the Central Advisory Committee that he was seeking its views on a package of minor reforms to the war pension system. On the same occasion, he advised the Central Advisory Committee about changes to the handling of cases involving sensorineural hearing loss. Both prompted a substantial number of representations, only two of which suggested that an oral statement would be appropriate.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Selective Cull Scheme

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if producers who have cattle slaughtered under the selective cull scheme will be able to claim suckler cow and beef special premium and hill

livestock compensatory allowances for those cattle slaughtered in the retention period for those payments; and if he will make a statement. [17397]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* We have been in contact with the European Commission on this point and hope to be able to make an announcement in the near future.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total public expenditure under the CAP paid in the last year to farmers in *(a)* Devon and *(b)* Cornwall. [17391]

Mr. Baldry: Total public expenditure under the CAP paid to farmers in 1995—the last year for which figures are available—was as follows:

(a) Devon: £55,005,315

(b) Cornwall: £30,283,103

It should be noted that a small proportion of these totals relates to non-CAP schemes funded by the EU and in some cases amounts include an element of national as well as EU funding. Devon and Cornwall farmers also benefit from expenditure on market support measures, even though this is not paid directly to them.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Insolvency Service

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the prior options studies of the Insolvency Service, companies registry and trading standards branches of the Department of Economic Development have been completed; and if he will make a statement on the outcomes. [18507]

Mr. Ancram: These studies, which were undertaken by independent consultants, have been completed and Ministers have concluded that, given the size of the organisations involved, agentisation, either on an individual basis, or collectively, would be inappropriate. Ministers have agreed, however, that next steps principles should be applied to the management of the statutory and regulatory functions which all three branches are required to perform.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Juvenile Cases (Legal Aid)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what were *(a)* the total costs of legal aid in juvenile cases in the youth court and *(b)* the average cost per case in the latest year for which figures are available. [17284]

Mr. Streeter: The total gross cost of legal aid in respect of juvenile cases heard in the youth court during 1995–96 was £16.8 million. The average unit cost of these proceedings was £439.

DEFENCE

Radiobiological Research Laboratory Alverstoke

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* reports and *(b)* other publications currently available from the radiobiological research laboratory at Alverstoke. [17901]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 28 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your question asking for a list of reports and publications currently available from the Radiobiological Research Laboratory at Alverstoke. In the absence of more specific information I have assumed that your question refers to the former Defence Radiological Protection Service, now known as DERA Radiation Protection Services (DRPS) at Alverstoke. As Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) this matter is my responsibility.

A list of reports and publications which have been issued by DRPS subsequent to the list published in Hansard, 8 December 1993 Col 285, is as follows: This list excludes classified reports and work which is still underway and not yet cleared for publication.

I hope this is helpful.

Unclassified DRPS reports and publications

Marine Environmental Radioactivity. Surveys at Nuclear Submarine Berths In the UK 1992, published by HMSO

Investigations to determine the response of the DRPS Passive Radon Monitor

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle, November 1993

Quality Assurance Check of Canberra Emergency Systems

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle—February 1994

The Decontamination of Radium and Promethium Luminised P-11 Compasses

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle—April 1994

Compendium of Parliamentary Questions and Answers for 1992 and 1993

CR39 Neutron Dosimetry Low Energy Neutron Response—Planar and Isotropic Neutron Dosimeters (March 1994)

Dosimetry Statistics 1993

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle—July 1994

DRPS Radiological Survey at RAF Carlisle

Marine Environmental Radiation Surveys at Nuclear Submarine Berths—1993, published by HMSO

RAF Greenham Common Environmental Monitoring Report

DRPS Radiological Survey at Purfleet Ranges

DRPS Radiological Survey at RAF Sculthorpe

Comparison of the Neutron Calibration Facilities at Berkeley Technology Centre and the Defence Radiological Protection Service

CR39 Neutron Dosimetry—An Investigation into the Effect of Changing the Offset Parameter on the Autoscan 60 Reader on the Response and Signal to Noise Ratio of the DRPS CR39 Planar Neutron Dosimeter

CR39 Neutron Dosimetry—The Effect of Changing Chemical Processing Parameters on the Response of the DRPS Neutron Dosimeter

CR39 Neutron Dosimeters—Identification of CR39 Elements with Spuriously High Background Track Density Readings Prior to Use

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle—February 1995

RAF Upper Heyford—Radiation Monitoring Report

Dosimetry Statistics 1994

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle—May 1995

Royal Arsenal East Woolwich Radiological Survey

DRPS Support to RAF Carlisle—May 1995

DRPS Support to RAF Carlisle—August 1995

DRPS Support to RAF Carlisle—September 1995

Marine Environmental Radioactivity Surveys at Nuclear Submarine Berths in the UK 1994, published by HMSO

Radio Frequency Monitoring Survey of the Kirkcudbright EMLF Facility

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle—October 1995

Personnel Radiation Hazard (RADHAZ) Survey of the Watchman Radar—HMS Cambridge

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle—November 1995

Measurement of Tritium in Air Concentration at Donnington Garrison

Requirements for Setting Up a Facility at No. 16 MU (RAF Stafford) for Packing Equipment for Shipment to Drigg

The Handling and Use of 20 mm DS, Linked MK 149 Rounds for the Mk15 Weapons System (Phalanx)

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle—January 1996

DRPS Survey of RAF Quedgeley (Sites 2 and 4)

Radiological Survey of No. 3 and No. 4 Sites 14 MU RAF Carlisle

Charm 3 Ammunition Container Assembly Radiation Trial

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle—March 1996

DRPS Survey of RAF Scampton

DRPS Survey of RAF Finningley

Radiological Survey of RM Coypool

The following reports were issued after DRPS joined DERA (1 April 1996)

DRPS Survey at IPTM Halton

DRPS Survey of RAF North Luffenham Technical Site

DRPS Survey at RAFH Halton

CHARM 3 Ammunition in Tank Radiation Trial

The use of Ionising Radiation Sources in the Ministry of Defence

Radiological Survey of ABRO Old Dalby

Rapier 2000 Repair Facility Radiation Trial

Radiological Surveys of Ditton Park, Slough

DRPS Survey of RAF North Luffenham EOD Enclave Area

RAF North Luffenham Land Quality Assessment Radioactive Contamination Issues

Radiological Survey of HMS Daedalus

DRPS Survey of RAF Alconbury and RAF Upwood

Land Quality Survey at ABRO Ashford

232Th Survey at ABRO Donnington

Land Quality Survey of ABRO Old Dalby

Radiological Survey of OSU Weyhill

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle—May 1996

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle—June 1996

Radiological Survey of Royal Marines Barracks Seaton

Dosimetry Statistics 1995

RAF Greenham Common Environmental Monitoring Report (amended)

Radiological Survey of ABRO Aldershot

RAF Swanton Morley Land Quality Assessment Radioactive Contamination Issues

Radiological Survey of RNSD Spring Quarry

Land Quality Survey at Ashford Site

Intrusive Site Investigation, Rowcroft and Templar Barracks, Ashford

DRPS Support to MOD Compensation Scheme

Radiological Safety Assessment of Radiography at NAML

DRPS Support to RAF Carlisle

RAF Norton Disney LQA

RAF Lordsbridge LQA

RAF Chilmark—Ham Cross Site LQA

RAF Chilmark—Lady Down Site

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle Decontamination

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle Decontamination

RAF Chilmark LQA—Radiation Monitoring in Buildings

RAF Little Heath—DRPS Survey

RAF Barnham—DRPS Survey

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle Decontamination

RAF Carlisle No. 9 Site—Preliminary Radioactive Contamination Survey

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle Decontamination

RAF Riseley LQA

RAF Quedgley—Radioactivity Survey No. 6 Site

DRPS Laboratory Support to RAF Carlisle Decontamination

Marine Environmental Radioactivity Surveys at Nuclear Submarine Berths, 1995

Defence Costs Studies

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each of his Department's defence cost studies; what were the estimated savings accruing from the implementation of proposals contained in each study; and what is his current estimate of how much each proposal will save. [18114]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to my answer given to the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) on 26 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *196–97*.

Nuclear Tests (Compensation)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy in respect of claims that former service personnel who participated in the nuclear tests programme in Australia and the south Pacific have developed *(a)* leukaemia, excluding chronic lymphatic and *(b)* multiple myeloma as a result of those tests; and if he will make a statement. [17953]

Mr. Soames: My Department's policy is based on the conclusions of the studies by the National Radiological Protection Board. The second report concluded that the excess of leukaemia in test participants compared with controls in the period two to 25 years after the tests is likely to be a chance finding, although the possibility that test participation may have caused a small risk of developing leukaemia in the early years after the tests cannot be completely ruled out. It also concluded that data available from the additional follow-up since 1988 did not support the suggestion from the previous report that participants may have experienced a small hazard of multiple myeloma, which also appeared to be a chance finding.

The general conclusion of the NRPB studies was that participation in the nuclear weapon testing programme had not had a detectable effect on the participants' expectation of life nor on their risk of developing cancer or other diseases.

These findings provide no grounds for claims for compensation and no such claims have been made against my Department.

Law of Armed Conflict

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the revision of the manual of military law of armed conflict currently planned by Her Majesty's Government are part of a concerted NATO revision. [18101]

Mr. Soames: No. However, the authors have been in informal consultations with other nations which are working on similar projects including some NATO countries.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the planned new joint service manual on the law of armed conflict to replace part III of the manual of military law will be published; what consultations will be held on its revision; and if he is prepared to accept representations on it. [18091]

Mr. Soames: A text for a draft joint service manual was prepared some years ago but held in abeyance pending decisions on the ratification by the UK of the additional protocols to the Geneva conventions of 1949. That text is currently being updated to take into account recent developments in the field although no final date can be given as yet for its completion. The draft is being prepared by service officers, assisted by an eminent academic consultant, and the final text will be subject to comment both within the Ministry of Defence and other interested Departments prior to publication. There are no plans for public consultation or comment. Once published, it will be available to the public and subject to regular update and amendment.

Family Quarters (Rents)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial assistance his Department plans to provide for service personnel to assist with increases in rents for family quarters; and if he will make a statement. [17948]

Mr. Soames: We do not propose to introduce any additional financial assistance to compensate for the rises in service accommodation charges.

The Armed Forces Pay Review Body recommends levels of pay and charges broadly comparable to those in the civilian sector. The level of accommodation charge is based on the costs of comparable housing, less an abatement to take account of the relative disadvantages of living in service accommodation. Taking account of the increases in pay due to come into effect on 1 April and 1 December 1997, no personnel will experience a net decrease in pay as a result of the increases in accommodation charges.

Scots Guardsmen Fisher and Wright

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representation he has received from General Sir David Scott-Barrett of the Scots Guards regarding Scots Guardsmen Fisher and Wright. [18208]

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend has received one representation direct from General Scott-Barrett. He and I have received a number of others from hon. Members about the case of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright.

Aircraft Crashes (Investigations)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's aircraft crashes which are still under investigation. [18112]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

10 January 1996: 2 RAF Tornado F3s

23 January 1996: RAF Jaguar GR1B

13 February 1996: RAF Hawk T1

19 February 1996: RAF Harrier GR7

23 February 1996: RAF Tornado GR1

26 February 1996: RAF Tornado GR1

26 February 1996: RN Harrier T4N

26 May 1996: RAF Hawk T1

24 July 1996: RAF Jaguar GR1A

18 September 1996: RAF Jaguar T2A

28 September 1996: MOD(PE) Tornado F3

9 January 1997: RAF Harrier GR7

15 February 1997: RAF Puma HC1

Empty Homes (Disposal)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *367*, what were the total receipts for the sale of the empty homes by the end of summer 1996. [18113]

Mr. Soames: Of the 5,348 disposals, 2,373 formed part of the service families married quarter sale to Annington Homes and the value of surplus homes cannot be separately identified. A total of 2,687 were sold through the normal processes but receipts information is not held centrally and therefore it has not been possible to collate cost data in the time available: I will write to the hon. Member. Two hundred and fifteen houses were demolished as surplus or as part of the demolition and rebuild programme and thus did not attract receipts. Seventy-three houses were leased pending later sale.

The above figures cover the 18-month period to 30 September 1996 and include the Annington Homes sales for which contracts were exchanged on 24 September 1996.

Al Bilad Building

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his staff work from the Al Bilad building, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; if his Department is the owner of the building; and which organisation is responsible for its security arrangements. [17238]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The building mentioned is not owned by my Department. I am withholding information on the security arrangements under exemption 4(f) of the code of practice on access to government information 1997.

TREASURY

Income Tax (Recovery of Interest)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he proposes to take to stop computer-generated claims for interest on tax payments received under self-assessment after 31 January where the cost of recovering the interest exceeds the interest; and if he will make a statement. [17182]

Mr. Jack: Self-assessment statements of account were not, and will not, be issued solely to advise taxpayers of small amounts of interest due.

Repair and Maintenance (VAT)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the gross sum collected per annum by HM Customs and Excise in respect of the VAT levied on the repair and maintenance of private dwellings. [17082]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* Statistics on the VAT collected on repairs and maintenance of private dwellings are not directly available. The gross VAT liability in 1995 in respect of repairs, maintenance and alterations carried out by contractors on private sector housing is estimated at £1.2 billion.

Inland Revenue (Corruption)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date the former head of the Inland Revenue special investigations unit *(a)* was arrested for corrupt practices and *(b)* requested information relating to the tax returns made by a right hon. Member. [17367]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* Mr. Michael Allcock, the former head of the Inland Revenue's London special office 2 was arrested on suspicion of corruption on 27 July 1993.

With reference to the second part of the hon. Member's question, the rules on taxpayer confidentiality prevent the disclosure of any information relating to the tax affairs of any particular taxpayer or taxpayers.

Vehicle and Fuel Taxation

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent environmental considerations informed the scale of increase in vehicle fuel taxation in his last budget. [17361]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Government's policy on fuel duties is an important part of their overall environmental policy. The policy of successive UK Governments has been to charge duty on road fuels at rates which will not only raise sufficient revenue but also take account of the need to conserve finite stocks of fossil fuels a protect the general environment.

A commitment to raise road fuel duties by an average of at least 5 per cent. each year in real terms was announced in the 1993 Budget. The aim of these tax rises is to encourage fuel efficiency and to help to control harmful pollution. This will help to reach the Rio convention commitment by returning emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases—methane, nitrous oxide—to their 1990 levels by the year 2000. As a result, pollution from vehicles is already coming down.

In order to encourage the use of high-mileage vehicles in our towns and cities and of more environmentally friendly fuels, two measures were announced: the duty rate of ultra-low sulphur diesel will be reduced by 1p per litre relative to ordinary diesel, when the necessary international agreement is attained. Ultra-low sulphur diesel is cleaner than ordinary diesel, but is slightly more expensive to produce. This measure will encourage the use of ultra-low sulphur diesel. We also announced 25 per cent. reduction in the duty on road fuel gases. This means the duty rate for gas used as road fuel is now 21.13 pence per kilogram—approximately 1.5 litres—compared with 41.68p per litre for leaded petrol and 36.86p per litre for unleaded petrol and diesel road fuel.

Mr. Olner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the yield in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and what is the estimated yield in 1996–97 from (i) petrol duty, (ii) derv duty, (iii) vehicle excise duty, (iv) VAT on petrol and derv rates and (v) VAT on vehicle sales. [17515]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested is shown in the table:

£ billions

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97 (forecast)*
petrol duty	9.6	10.1	—
derv duty	4.4	5.3	—
Total fuel duties	14.0	15.4	[1]17.4
VED	3.8	4.0	4.3
VAT on fuel duties	2.5	2.7	3.0
VAT on vehicle sales	3.4	3.6	[2]n/a

[1] Petrol and derv forecast receipts are not published separately.
[2] Separate forecasts of VAT on vehicle sales are not available.

Local Tax Offices

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of local tax offices are meeting their performance targets for dealing with *(a)* personal callers, *(b)* telephone calls, *(c)* repayment claims and *(d)* correspondence. [17890]

Mr. Jack: The Inland Revenue does not publish its performance against annual targets until results covering the full period are available and appropriate validation and checking of figures has been carried out.

Based on latest provisional figures, most local tax offices are currently on course to meet or exceed their annual targets for personal callers and telephone calls, but are unlikely to achieve their correspondence targets. The claims target applies only to specialist repayment offices, which are on course to meet or exceed this target.

Weatherguard, Halbeath, Fife

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in respect of the action by Customs and Excise against Weatherguard, Halbeath, Fife, in 1992–93 *(a)* the date and location of the seizure of jackets, *(b)* the number of jackets seized, *(c)* their country of manufacture and the manufacturer, *(d)* the

haulier involved, *(e)* the date of the alleged criminal act, *(f)* the fine charged against the company, *(g)* the date when the fine was paid and *(h)* the intended destination of the jackets. [17262]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* The Commissioners of Customs and Excise owe a duty of confidence to the trader in this case and cannot release the information requested.

Income Tax

Mr. Richards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue consequences of raising the basic rate of income tax in Wales to 25p in the pound. [17869]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* The latest available information is for 1994–95. The full-year yield of increasing the basic rate of tax by 1p under the 1994–95 tax regime and at 1994–95 income levels is £70 million.

Mr. Richards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate of the revenue raised by a 50 per cent. tax rate on incomes of £40,000 plus per annum in Wales. [17867]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* The latest available information is for 1994–95. The full-year yield under the 1994–95 tax regime and at 1994–95 income levels of introducing a new rate of 50 per cent. on taxable incomes above £40,000 is £30 million. The yield does not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of the new rate of tax.

Mr. Richards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue consequences of raising income tax thresholds in Wales so that 30,000 people would be removed from income tax liability. [17871]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* The latest available information is for 1994–95. The full-year cost under the 1994–95 tax regime and at 1994–95 income levels of increasing non-aged and aged personal allowances by £330 is £70 million—this would have taken 30,000 taxpayers out of income tax.

Mr. Lamont: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the changes in the basic top rates of income tax over the last 30 years. [18144]

Mr. Jack: Tables 1.5 and 1.10 of the 1996–97 "Tax Benefit Reference Manual" gives income tax rates for years 1967–68 to 1996–97, a copy of which can be found in the Library.

Proposed rates for 1997–98 are as follows:

Taxable income £ *per annul*	*Rate of income tax percentage*
Up to 4,100	20
4,101–26,100	23
Over 26,101	40

European Funds (Republic of Ireland)

Mr. Richards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the net transfer of European funds to the Republic of Ireland in each of the last five years. [17875]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* The European Court of Auditors annual reports indicate that the net benefits to the Republic of Ireland from the EC budget, for the years 1991 to 1995, the last five years for which information is available, are as listed in the table:

Year	*Million ecu*	£ *million*[1]
1991	2357.3	1650.3
1992	2140.1	1571.3
1993	2371.9	1846.6
1994	1752.0	1355.6
1995	1886.9	1545.2

[1] Converted from ecu to £ using the average annual exchange rate listed in the Annual White Paper, "Statement on the Community Budget".

Public Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18126]

Mr. Jack: Table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–8", the Red Book, is derived from returns made by Departments as part of the pre-Budget expenditure round. Although the Treasury publishes these figures, ultimate responsibility for each departmental figure remains with individual Departments. Detailed questions on table 5.5 should therefore be directed towards the relevant Department.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the past three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16182]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have asked directors of the Department's executive agencies to reply to the hon. Member separately.

For the headquarters of the Department, excluding agencies and the Government offices, it is not possible to provide information in the form requested. Temporary staff are recruited from employment agencies to cover, usually, short-term secretarial and administrative support duties. Data on the average length of temporary staff recruited from agencies, the numbers employed and the median cost paid to agencies per person employed are not available.

However, the agencies most commonly used in the past three years are Alfred Marks, Brook Street, Manpower, Josephine Summers and Kelly. The total cost to the Department for agency staff in the past three financial years is as follows;

1994–95 £0.4 million

1995–96: £1.3 million

1996–97 (April–January) £2.1 million

Expenditure in 1996–97 is not directly comparable with previous years, which do not take account of the machinery of government changes announced in July 1995.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 28 February 1997:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about the use made by The Insolvency Service of private employment agencies.

I should first explain that The Service undertakes its own recruitment of permanent and many of its casual staff, and does not use the services of employment agencies for that purpose. It does however take on temporary staff from agencies, usually to cover a short-term need for example to assist in the completion of a specific project or to cover for the temporary absence of permanent staff. In addition, The Service has taken on accountancy and legal staff on short term contracts through agencies to support its investigative role.

The total cost to The Service of agency staff in each of the last two years has been—

1994–95: £476,700

1995–96: £2,650,400

The information held by The Service on its agency staff is not maintained in a form which would enable it to provide the further details you have asked for except at disproportionate cost.

Letter from Iain MacGregor to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 28 February 1997:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to answer the question on behalf of the Chief Executive of NWML who is on business away from the office. The answer is set out below.

Year	*Agency (a)*	*Numbers (b)*	*Total cost (c)*	*Length of contract (d)*[1]
Employment agencies				
1993–94	Reed Employment	1	[2]—	14 months
1994–95	Reed Employment	1	[2]—	4 months
1995–96	Reed Employment	1	[2]—	4 months
1996–97	Walch Employment Ltd.	1	[2]—	3 months
Recruitment agencies				
1995–96	Capita Recruitment Services	1	1,983	Permanent
1996–97	Draft Personnel Ltd.	1	2,645	Permanent

[1] We are unable to provide an average length of contract because two recruits remain members of staff.
[2] Because of the nature of payments to Employment Agencies we are unable to extract the information at reasonable cost.

Letter from J. C. Octon To Mr. Mike Hall, dated 28 February 1997:

In the absence of the Chief Executive I am replying for the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade about the use of private employment agencies.

The Patent Office operates in a competitive international market and has operated a policy of employing agency staff to minimise the risk to its permanent staff of redundancy consequent on fluctuations in demand. The agencies it has used to supply temporary staff are: Reed Employment, Securicor Recruitment Services Ltd., Western Staff Services, Acorn Recruitment, Manpower Employment Agency, Kelter International Ltd., Brook Street, Meridian Business Support, Kelly Services and Select Appointments PD Bureau—London. The monthly average number of agency staff employed in the last three years has been 1994: 30, 1995: 50 and 1996: 42 and the total annual cost £323,958, £539,689 and £495,240 respectively. The average hourly rate paid to the agencies for the staff supplied was around £4.20 in 1994, £4.50 in 1995 and £4.80 in 1996. The average length of employment for agency staff has been in the range 3.5 to 4 months. The Patent Office also employs a small number of specialist IT practitioners employed normally through specialist companies. The figures given above exclude such staff.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 28 February 1997:

You recently asked the President of the Board of Trade for information about the use of private employment agencies within his Department and Agencies. I am responding as Chief Executive of Companies House Executive Agency.

The following table gives names of agencies used over the last three years, the numbers of people from each agency, length of contract and the cost per hour.

Year	*Agency name*	*Length of contract*	*Number employed*	*Cost per hour* £
1994	Jobwise	5 weeks	1	6.85
1994–95	Target	13 weeks	1	6.50
1995	Office Angels	3 weeks	2	7.35
1996	Office Angels	2–3 weeks	2	8.25
1996	Pertemps	[1]2–17 weeks	5	[2]6.30

[1] Average.
[2] Average 7.

The total cost to the Agency for the years 1995–96 was £20,580; the average cost per person recruited is £6.90 per hour; contract periods average 5–6 weeks per person.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 28 February 1997:

To ask the President of the Board of Trade, if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies.

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency to the above PQ.

Over the past three years the RA has used the following private employment agencies:

1994–95

Accountancy Personnel

Adeeko/ADIA Ltd (Alfred Marks)

Arena Staff Agency

Manpower plc

Reed Staffing Services Ltd

1995–96

Adeeko/ADIA Ltd (Alfred Marks)

Badenoch and Clark

EGB

Manpower plc

Nextep Ltd

Office Angels

Professional Recruitment Solutions

Reed Staffing Services Ltd

1996–97

Adeeko/ADIA Ltd (Alfred Marks)

Badenoch and Clark

London Staff Bureau

Manpower plc

Nextep Ltd

Office Angels

RJC (UK) Ltd.

The total cost to the Radiocommunications Agency of using the employment agencies in the last three years was:

1994–95: £64,322.05

1995–96: £498,456.14

1996–97 (April–January): £277,809.17.

I am sorry that it is not possible to identify for each of the years the number of employment agency staff, the average length of contract for persons recruited from agencies and the median cost paid to agencies per person employed.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersens, *(c)* BMI, *(d)* Capita and *(e)* Sema since 1992 and the broad function to be carried out by the contractor, and the value of the contract in each case. [17608]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The following information is held centrally on contracts awarded to the companies in question:

Company	*Number of contracts awarded since 1992*
EDS	0
Andersens	2
BMI	0
Capita	6
Sema	4

All the above contracts relate to external consultancy and their total value is £512,613; commercial sensitivity prevents the disclosure of individual contract values.

Information on other contracts could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The above information does not include contracts let by the Department's executive agencies, and I have asked the chief executives to reply separately to this question.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 28 February 1997:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about contracts awarded to EDS, Andersens, BMI, Capita and Sema by The Insolvency Service since 1992.

The Insolvency Service awarded a contract by competitive tender to Capita Managed Services Limited in November 1995 for the collection of costs awarded by the courts against directors who are disqualified under section 6 of Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986. Capita's fees are based on a percentage of what they collect: it is thus not possible to say what fees will be earned by them in the three year period the contract runs.

No contracts have been awarded by The Insolvency Service to EDS, Andersens, BMI and Sema since 1992.

Letter from J. C. Octon to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 28 February 1997:

In the absence of the Chief Executive on official business abroad I am replying for the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade about contracts placed with various named contractors. The Patent Office has awarded no contracts to any of the companies listed in the period since 1992.

Letter from Dr. Seton Bennett to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 28 February 1997:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about contracts awarded to five companies.

The Agency employed Capita Recruitment last year to recruit a member of staff. We paid them at their normal commercial rate.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 28 February 1997:

Mr John Taylor, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, has asked me to reply on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency to your Question about Agency contracts with certain firms.

Since 1992 the Agency has contracted with:

EDS Defence Ltd.,—investigation into increasing the usage and improving the quality of service available on shared channel private mobile radio services in the UK—£69,525;

EDS Defence Ltd.,—study into PMR channel usage—£62,000; and

Sema Group Systems Ltd.,—development and documentation of project management standards—£15,150.

The Agency has also bought some IT equipment from GCAT (Govnerment IT/IS Catalogue) which Electronic Data Systems Ltd., (and ICL) operate on behalf of CCTA.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 28 February 1997:

You recently asked the President of the Board of Trade about contracts awarded since 1992 to EDS, Andersens, BMI, Capita and Sema. I am replying in respect of Companies House Executive Agency.

Companies House has awarded one contract which meets these criteria. On 1 July 1996 Capita Managed Services Ltd., was awarded a contract to operate a telephone enquiry service and a service involving the acceptance and fulfilment of orders for company searches for delivering by post or fax. The contract is for a 3 year period, and an approximate annual value of £800,000.

Privatisation

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what terms the chief executive of Unipart was retained by his Department in connection with an initiative intended to improve the image of privatisation. [17396]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* John Neill, the chief executive of the Unipart group of companies, was one of four chief executives and company chairmen who accepted my invitation to speak at a DTI conference— "Privatisation: Setting Enterprise Free"—on 5 December 1996, the main purpose of which was to help British companies to secure privatisation business in other countries. Mr. Neill delivered a speech setting out his personal view on how the privatisation of Unipart had enabled the company to improve its performance. Like all speakers, he gave his services free of charge.

Inward Investment

Mr. Carttiss: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to improve the arrangements for attracting inward investment into the eastern region; and if he will make a statement. [18558]

Mr. Greg Knight: The attraction of inward investment is a major UK success story and the Government intend to maintain this excellent record. In England, there are already eight regional development organisations working in partnership with my Department's own Invest in Britain Bureau to attract inward investment.

I consider it important for an RDO to be established in the east of England because the region has some unique strengths that could help it to win business in a very competitive environment. I have been impressed, too, by the strength of the public and private sector partnership that has got the East of England Investment Agency under way so quickly.

I am therefore announcing today a £505,000 grant, which will help the East of England Investment Agency to be launched formally in 1997–98 and hit the ground running. It is proof of our continuing commitment to the encouragement of inward investment.

The many global companies already operating in the east of England are a clear endorsement of the advantages of doing business here and I have no doubt that the East of England Investment Agency will play a key role in maximising those benefits for the regional economy.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

St. Helenians

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the current upper age limit for St. Helenians coming to work in the United Kingdom under the training and work experience scheme. [17477]

Mrs. Gillan: No upper age limit is applied to St. Helenians wishing to undertake training or work experience in the United Kingdom.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the contracts awarded by her Department to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersens, *(c)* BMI, *(d)* Capita and *(e)* Sema since 1992, and the broad function to be carried out by the contractor and the value of the contract in each case. [17599]

Mr. Robin Squire: The list of contracts awarded by the Department for Education and Employment and the Employment Service is as follows:

EDS	*Costs* £
The Government catalogue of IT supplies	207,000
Software supply to Students Loan Company (1989–95)	[1]3,000,000
IT Human Factors risk analysis	5,000
Andersens	
Systems analysis on Employment Services Payments project	296,000
Interface development between ES systems and NUBS2	77,500
Cobol programming support	£33,500
Systems design on Employment Services Payments system	350,000
Job Seekers Allowance project, implementation risk analysis	88,000
Job Seekers Allowance project, expert implementation assistance	12,245,000
Supply and support Optical Character Recognition system for the 1993 Census of employment	4,000,000
BMI	
There are no contracts recorded with a company called BMI	
Capita	
Consultancy on market testing of payroll	25,000
Nursery Vouchers pilot scheme	450,000
Nursery Vouchers national implementation	15,000,000
Contractorisation of Teachers Pensions Agency	72,000,000
Sema	
Ingres database design work	31,800
Database design work	£44,400
Job Seekers Allowance, expert implementation assistance	12,500
Information exchange and dissemination study	57,000
Human resource management systems feasibility study	4,750

[1] Per annum.

Nursery Schools

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of *(a)* four-year-olds and *(b)* rising fives attended (i) local education authority nursery schools and (ii) pre-primary classes in each metropolitan district in the most recent period for which figures are available. [17900]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department does not publish information on percentages or participation rates of four-year-olds or rising fives by local education authority area. Participation rates of children under five in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools by local education authority area in England in January 1996 will be published in a statistical bulletin on 28 February and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received in the last six months relating to the introduction of nursery school vouchers, from (i) local education authorities, (ii) teaching bodies, (iii) nursery schools, (iv) parents, (v) parents representative bodies and (vi) others; and if she will make a statement. [17710]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has received representations from a variety of sources about the nursery education voucher scheme.

Schools (Staff Checks)

Mr. Jaimeson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment her Department has made as to whether *(a)* the Bradfield House school, Cullompton, and *(b)* the Quantock school, Taunton, have made the legally required checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. [17933]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* Ofsted and social services departments, in the course of their inspections, examine schools' observance of the legal requirements in this area. The Department received a social services department report in December 1996 which drew attention to shortcomings in Bradfield House school's staff recruitment and vetting procedures. An agreement has been prepared between the school, Devon SSD and the police for implementing measures to improve these procedures. Advice about Quantock school, Tauton, confirms that the correct procedures are followed.

New Nursery Classes

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals to open new nursery classes in primary/infant schools she has received but has not yet approved and in each case when she received the proposal and how many places are involved. [17896]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows proposals for new nursery classes received in the Department but not yet decided, when the proposals were published and the number of full-time equivalent places involved.

Outstanding Nursery Proposals

LEA	*School name*	*Publication date*	*Number of FTE places*
County schools			
Cheshire	Woodlands County Infant School	14 November 1996	13
Coventry	St. Christopher Primary	6 December 1996	26
Coventry	John Shelton Primary School	6 December 1996	26
Coventry	Alderman Harris Primary	6 December 1996	26
Coventry	Allesley Primary	13 February 1997	26
Coventry	Ernesford Grange Primary	6 February 1997	26
Coventry	Ravensdale Primary	6 February 1997	26
Devon	North Prospect County Primary School	24 January 1997	26
Devon	Newton Abbot Decoy Primary	24 January 1997	26
Devon	Ladysmith First School	24 January 1997	26
Devon	Sherwell Valley Primary School	31 January 1997	26
Devon	Eggbuckland Vale Primary School	31 January 1997	26
Essex	Kings Ford County Infant School	6 June 1996	26
Essex	Northlands County Primary School	6 June 1996	26
Essex	Hazelmere Infant School	4 June 1996	26
Essex	Montgomery Infant School	6 June 1996	26
Hertfordshire	Priors Wood	22 November 1996	15
Hertfordshire	Panshanger	22 November 1996	15
Hertfordshire	Abel Smith JMI School	22 November 1996	15
Hertfordshire	Killigrew Infant School	21 June 1996	13
Hertfordshire	Goldfield Infant School	21 June 1996	13
Hertfordshire	Leavesden Green JMI School	21 June 1996	13
Hertfordshire	Grove Road Primary School	22 November 1996	26
Hertfordshire	Eastbury Farm JMI School	22 November 1996	13
Hertfordshire	Woodside JMI School	22 November 1996	15
Hertfordshire	Mayfield Infant School	22 November 1996	25
Hertfordshire	Holy Rood Infant VA School	22 November 1996	30
Hertfordshire	Wheatcroft JMI School	6 December 1996	22.5
Hertfordshire	Cassiobury Infants School	6 December 1996	30
Hertfordshire	Springmead JMI School	6 December 1996	30
Hertfordshire	Kimpton JMI School	6 December 1996	11.5
Hertfordshire	Templewood JMI School	6 December 1996	30
Hertfordshire	Abbots Langley School	22 November 1996	26
Hertfordshire	Fairfields JMI School	22 November 1996	17
Hertfordshire	Gade Valley JMI School	22 November 1996	15
Hertfordshire	Hollybush JMI School	22 November 1996	15
Hertfordshire	Micklem JMI School	22 November 1996	15
Hertfordshire	Mill Mead JMI School	22 November 1996	15
Hertfordshire	Millbrook JMI School	22 November 1996	15
Hertfordshire	Russell JMI School	22 November 1996	15
Hertfordshire	Sheredes JMI School	22 November 1996	18
Hertfordshire	The Reddings JMI School	22 November 1996	15
Hertfordshire	Ryde JMI School	22 November 1996	13
Hertfordshire	Studlands Rise JMI School	22 November 1996	15
Hertfordshire	Aycliff Drive JMI School	14 February 1997	21
Hertfordshire	Boxmoor JMI School	14 February 1997	15
Hertfordshire	Lordship Farm JMI School	14 February 1997	26
Hertfordshire	Westfield JMI School	14 February 1997	13
Kent	Parkside County Primary School	19 December 1996	26
Kingston upon Thames	Robin Hood Primary School	31 January 1997	26
Liverpool	Walton St. Mary's JMI School	3 October 1996	30
Liverpool	Belle Vale County JMI School	11 October 1996	30
Redbridge	Highlands Primary School	16 January 1997	26
Voluntary aided schools			
Barnsley	Ellis CE Junior and Infant School	19 July 1996	26
Camden	St. Mary's CE Primary School	15 November 1996	26
Coventry	All Souls RC (VA) Primary School	10 October 1996	26
Croydon	St. Joseph's Infant	26 July 1996	26
Croydon	St. Chad's RC Primary	7 August 1996	26
Hertfordshire	Broxbourne	22 November 1996	17.5
Hertfordshire	Nash Mills JMI School	7 June 1996	13
Hertfordshire	St. Dominic's RC Primary School	7 June 1996	13
Hertfordshire	St. Michael's JMI School	7 June 1996	13
Hertfordshire	St. John's RC JMI VA School	11 November 1996	13
Hertfordshire	St. Nicholas JMI VA School	11 November 1996	15
Hertfordshire	St. Joseph's RC JMI VA School	7 February 1997	21
Hertfordshire	Park Street JMI VA School	14 February 1997	13
Hertfordshire	St. Andrew's CE JMI VA School	14 February 1997	13
Leeds	Christ The King RC Primary	29 November 1996	26
Liverpool	St. Lawrence's CE VA Primary School	3 October 1996	30
Redbridge	SS Peter and Paul's RC Primary	14 March 1996	26
Wandsworth	Roehampton CE Primary School	13 December 1996	26
Wandsworth	Sacred Heart RC Primary School	24 October 1996	26
York	New Earswick Undenominational Primary	3 December 1996	26

Outstanding Nursery Proposals

LEA	School name	Publication date	Number of FTE places
Voluntary controlled schools			
Bexley	Foster's Primary	7 November 1996	26
Cheshire	St. Mary's CE (VC) Primary School	18 December 1996	13
Cumbria	Coniston Coe (VC) Primary School	13 December 1996	13
Devon	Great Torrington Bluecoat VC Infants' School	6 January 1997	26
Devon	Brixham C of E VC Infants' School	6 January 1997	26
Hertfordshire	St. John's Infants School	21 June 1996	26
Hertfordshire	Weston JMI School	6 December 1996	10
Hertfordshire	Wormley JMI School	6 December 1996	24
Hertfordshire	High Wych JMI VC School	14 January 1997	13
Grant maintained schools			
Birmingham	Walmley Infant GM School	4 October 1996	52
Birmingham	The Deanery CE GM Primary	13 September 1996	32
Croydon	Atwood Primary	23 December 1996	26
Essex	Upshire GM Primary School	9 November 1995	26
Essex	Waltham Holy Cross GM Infant School	10 November 1995	26
Essex	Coppins Green Primary	31 October 1996	26
Essex	Rochford Primary	20 September 1996	26
Gloucestershire	Sevenbanks GM Primary	19 June 1996	26
Hertfordshire	St. Mary's Catholic GM Primary	9 February 1996	13
Hertfordshrie	St. Catherine Of Siena Catholic Primary School	20 December 1996	26
Lincolnshire	William Hildyard CE GM Primary School	19 December 1996	13
Rochdale	Healey GM Primary School	10 January 1997	26
Staffordshire	Hollinsclough CE (GM) Primary	4 January 1997	14
Surrey	Hawkedale GM First School	24 October 1996	26
Surrey	Godstone Village School	30 January 1997	20
Wiltshire	St. Edmunds RC GM Primary	14 December 1995	34

Teachers' Pensions

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the cost to public funds of the teachers' early retirement scheme for each of the last five years. [14062]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* The estimated total cost to public funds, for the last five years for which data are available, is given in the following table, split between the extra cost of premature retirement to the teachers' superannuation scheme, and the expenditure incurred by public sector teachers' employers on enhancements to teachers' pensions. These are the extra costs within each financial year of pensions payable to all teachers who then or previously retired prematurely.

Year	Cost to TSS (£ million)[1]	Expenditure on enhancement (£ million)[2]	Total
1990–91	130	60	190
1991–92	150	80	230
1992–93	180	90	270
1993–94	210	110	320
1994–95	230	110	340

[1] Estimated from data supplied by teachers' pensions.
[2] Derived from RO1 data, and estimates for further and higher education derived from data supplied by teachers' pensions.

TRANSPORT

MV Braer

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current estimate of the costs incurred by his Department and agencies for which his Department is responsible in the clearing up operation which followed the grounding of the MV Braer on Shetland in January 1993. [17698]

Mr. Bowis: The marine pollution control unit, part of my Department's Coastguard agency, incurred costs of some £2.6 million in the clean-up operation following the grounding of the MV Braer. The Government have consistently said that their claim in respect of these costs and those incurred by the Scottish Office should be at the back of the queue for compensation.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress made in *(a)* building the Birmingham northern relief road and *(b)* developing the A628 Woodhead route. [17748]

Mr. Watts: The Birmingham northern relief road has been the subject of a lengthy public inquiry and the inspector's report is awaited.

The A57/A628 Mottram–Tinwistle bypass remains in the roads programme and a preferred route exists for it. The next stage will be the appointment of consultants to prepare the scheme for the publication of draft orders and of the environmental statement.

London Underground

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the loans which have been made to London Underground since 1967 indicating the dates on which the loans were repaid and those debts that remain outstanding. [18118]

Mr. Bowis: London Underground Ltd. did not exist as a separate business until 1984. The Department is not aware of any loans having been made to LUL.

Rolling Stock Leasing Companies

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reasons a clawback clause was not included in the contractual agreements used for the sale of the rolling stock leasing companies. [18158]

Mr. Watts: A proceeds clawback mechanism was rejected because it would almost certainly have led potential purchasers—most particularly venture capitalists

who offered the best bids for two of the three companies— either to withdraw altogether or at least to reduce their bids significantly.

Additionally, such a clawback mechanism would have been complex, difficult to police and would have run counter to the policy of establishing a clean break.

Railfreight Distribution

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the sale of Railfreight Distribution. [18157]

Mr. Watts: The British Railways Board has selected English Welsh and Scottish Railway as the preferred purchaser of Railfreight Distribution. The board is aiming to exchange contracts very shortly.

National Bus Company

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what sums have accrued to Her Majesty's Government as a result of the clawback clause written into the sale of the National Bus Company. [18243]

Mr. Watts: To date, a total of £8,055 million has been received in respect of mortgage charges placed on former National Bus Company properties under the clawback arrangement.

Train Operating Companies (Redundancy Payments)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the public service obligation payments made by the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising to the train operating companies includes payments to cover the costs of staff redundancies. [18156]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director makes payments under the franchise agreement to private operators, which purchase the rail services in the franchise agreement. It is for the operators to manage the services and the costs, including any redundancy costs.

The franchising director also makes payments under section 52 of the Railways Act 1993 to British Railways Board-owned operators for the provision of services prior to franchising. The calculation of grants to the BRB is based on the operator's projected costs after deducting forecast revenue and includes any redundancy costs.

PRIME MINISTER

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column 1042, what factors led him to conclude that it was doubtful that the Libyan Government would deliver the suspects for trial in The Hague under a Scottish judge under Scottish rules of evidence. [18209]

The Prime Minister: The Libyan Government may have said they accept the holding of the Lockerbie trial in a third country, and a trial in The Hague is one such proposal. But they have not said that they will ensure the appearance of the accused at any such trial. Despite agreeing in 1993 that a trial in Scotland would be fair, they have argued that they cannot compel the accused to stand trial there, or in the United States, in the absence of a bilateral extradition agreement with either country. The same Libyan argument would apply to The Hague, there being no extradition agreement between Libya and the Netherlands.

I conclude, after five years of Libyan prevarication over delivering the suspects for trial in Scotland, that it is extremely doubtful that they would surrender them for trial in a third country.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the contracts awarded by *(a)* the diplomatic wing of his Department and *(b)* ODA to (i) EDS, (ii) Andersens, (iii) BMI, (iv) Capita and (v) Sema since 1992 and the broad function to be carried out by the contractor and the value of the contract in each case. [17602]

Mr. Hanley: The information is in the table.

Diplomatic wing, FCO

(a) (i) EDS

We have placed 33 contracts with EDS since 1992 for IT systems integration services, individual values (£) as follows:

1. 8,114
2. 17,881
3. 604
4. 3,376
5. 80,760
6. 13,832
7. 4,682
8. 4,682
9. 4,682
10. 82,746
11. 8,788
12. 72,950
13. 7,562
14. 9,265
15. 11,950
16. 2,100
17. 8,200
18. 58,990
19. 1,254
20. 35,726
21. 11,000
22. 4,885
23. 4,500
24. 54,000
25. 4,720
26. 17,881
27. 9,992
28. 1,900
29. 7,000
30. 7,500
31. 2,400

32. 2,380

33. 3,080

(ii) Andersens—nil.

(iii) BMI—nil.

(iv) CAPITA

Thirty-nine contracts (the more recent deriving from a frameworked agreement advertised in the Official Journal of the European Communities in 1995 for skills in benchmarking, process re-engineering, market testing, change management, strategic planning support and other services) have been placed since 1992 for management consultancy services. Individual values (£) as follows:

1. 7,815

2. 1,921

3. 1,692

4. 7,590

5. 9,502

6. 214,360

7. 23,100

8. 8,328

9. 16,440

10. 33,413

11. 8,955

12. 10,448

13. 465

14. 320

15. 6,643

16. 12,800

17. 10,000

18. 10,809

19. 14,226

20. 36,556

21. 14,990

22. 1,428

23. 10,285

24. 300

25. 2,445

26. 2,445

27. 285

28. 27,000

29. 50,760

30. 17,100

31. 13,700

32. 13,700

33. 23,280

34. 14,535

35. 27,740

36. 40,904

37. 19,619

38. 9,141

39. 85,100

(v) SEMA

We have placed 6 contracts with Sema since 1992, individual values (£) as follows:

1. 76,359

2. 11,550

3. 15,466

4. 74,973

5. 47,000

6. 4,180

Aid wing, FCO

(b) (i) EDS—nil.

(ii) ANDERSENS.

Two contracts placed with Anderson Consulting since 1992, individual values (£) as follows:

1. 46,000.

2. 1.330,000.

(iii) BMI—nil.

(iv) CAPITA.

Two contracts placed with Capital since 1992, individual values (£) as follows:

1. 29,050.

2. 81,058

(v) SEMA—nil.

Embassies and High Commissions

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria govern the circumstances in which United Kingdom embassies and high commissions are staffed by personnel not from his Department or the Department of Trade and Industry; and if he will list those posts which are permanently staffed by such officials. [17707]

Mr. Hanley: FCO and DTI staff are chosen to fill overseas vacancies on the basis of their suitability, using open, competitive boarding procedures. When specialist knowledge or expertise is needed, officers from other Government Departments are, on occasions, also invited to bid.

Service attaché and support posts are permanently staffed by Ministry of Defence personnel. A proportion of entry clearance manager and officer posts are permanently staffed by members of HM immigration service. On the basis of available information, there are currently 371 MOD staff serving in 74 missions and 87 immigration service staff in 33 missions

In addition, there is a small number of specialist posts—for example, drug and airline liaison officers—some of which are wholly or partially funded by other Government Departments or external bodies, and filled permanently by their staff. No definitive list is currently available. One is being compiled and will be sent to the hon. Member at a later date.

UK MISSIONS IN WHICH CERTAIN POSTS ARE PERMANENTLY STAFFED BY MOD

Abu Dhabi

Accra

Amman

Ankara

Athens

Bahrain

Bangkok

Beirut

Belgrade

Berne

Bogota

Bonn

Brasilia

Bratislava

Bridgetown

BMATT Bridgetown

Brussels Embassy
Brussels, UKDEL NATO and WEU
Bucharest
Budapest
Cairo
Canberra
Caracas
Colombo
Copenhagen
Damascus
Dhaka
Doha
Dubai
Dublin
Guatemala
Hague
Harare
Helsinki
Islamabad
Jakarta
Kampala
Katmandu
Kiev
Kingston
Kinshasa
Kuala Lumpur
Kuwait
Lisbon
Madrid
Manila
Mexico City
Moscow
Muscat
Nairobi
New Delhi
Nicosia
Oslo
Ottawa
Paris
Peking
Prague
Pretoria
Rabat
Riga
Riyadh
Rome
Santiago
Seoul
Singapore
Sofia
Stockholm
Tel Aviv
Tokyo
Vienna
Warsaw
Washington
Wellington
Zagreb

UK missions in which certain posts are permanently staffed by members of HM immigration service

Abuja
Accra
Addis Ababa
Amman
Bankok
Banjul
Bombay
Cairo
Casablanca
Colombo
Dar Es Salaam
Dhaka
Dubai
Dusseldorf
Islamabad
Istanbul
Kampala
Karachi
Khartoum
Kiev
Kingston
Kuwait
Lagos
Lusaka
Madras
Manila
Moscow
Nairobi
New Delhi
Paris
Peking
Sana'a
St. Petersburg

Metin Goktepe

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if a British official attended the hearing on 6 February of the judicial investigation into the death of the Turkish journalist Metin Goktepe; and if he will make a statement. [17856]

Mr. David Davis: No British official was able to attend the Goktepe trial on 6 February. But we continue to follow this case closely, and we hope to be able to send an observer to attend the next session of the trial on 11 April.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Turkish Government about the alleged use of torture by police officers on witnesses of Metin Goktepe's death on 8 January. [17852]

Mr. David Davis: Our embassy in Ankara has raised a number of aspects about the Goktepe trial with the Turkish authorities. These include reports that police officers used torture on witnesses. We will continue to follow this case closely.

Seals (Russia)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 25 November 1996, *Official Report*, column 76, on the use of seals by the Russian authorities, if the information on research activities has now been provided. [17909]

Mr. Hanley: Despite repeated approaches from our embassy in Moscow, the Russian authorities have still not provided information on research activities on seals. Our embassy was most recently advised by the Russians on 31 January that the information was not yet available. We continue to press for this.

EU Information Offices

Mr. Lamont: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many EU information offices there are; what are their running costs; and what proposals Her Majesty's Government have to reduce the number of offices. [18078]

Mr. David Davis: We believe that the public should have ready access to factual information about the EU so that the debate on these important issues is as informed as possible.

Information about EU policy is available from Government Departments, public libraries and other information providers, including Commission representations in member states and third countries.

European Council

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the General Affairs Council held in Brussels on 24 February. [17960]

Mr. David Davis: Twenty-three of the 25 A points in document 6052/97, the text of which will be placed in the House as soon as it is available, were approved. They included the decision to sign an interim association agreement and joint statement on political dialogue with the PLO. Denmark entered waiting reserves on two points; an EU/Mexico agreement on control of precursors and maximum residue limits of veterinary medicinal products in foodstuffs of animal origin.

The Council noted the resolutions adopted by the European Parliament listed on documents 5091/97 and 5094/97. Copies of these documents will also be placed in the House as soon as they are available.

The Commission and presidency gave an oral presentation to the Council on the preparations of the second meeting of Foreign Ministers within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, which will be held in Malta on 15 and 16 April. The Council underlined the importance of the Malta meeting as an opportunity to take stock of progress and to set priorities for the future. The Council welcomed the signature of the EC-PLO interim association agreement, which was signed by Yasser Arafat for the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, the Commission and the presidency. The Council underlined its determination to conclude the negotiations with Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon as soon as possible.

The Council was unable to agree a common position for the political declaration on the structured dialogue with Cyprus. The structure dialogue meeting was therefore postponed, but the association council was held as planned.

After lengthy discussion of the draft agreements on humane standards for leghold traps, the Council concluded that the Commission should renew its contacts with the Russian, Canadian and US authorities with a view to adapting the draft agreements to reflect a number of Council recommendations. The Commission undertook to report on the results of its further contacts, hopefully before the end of March and in any case before the Environment Council in June 1997.

The Council noted, without debate, the Commission's report on the state of play on the US Helms-Burton Act. The Council expressed regret that the latest bilateral contacts with the USA had not produced an outcome sufficient for the EU to suspend its action in the World Trade Organisation, but underlined its willingness to seek an overall bilateral settlement and in that case to halt or suspend the panel procedure. The Commission gave a report on the successful outcome of the WTO telecoms negotiations in Geneva on 15 February.

The Commission reported that all outstanding obstacles to South Africa's qualified accession to Lomé had been resolved in its 17 to 18 February talks with South Africa. The Council conclusions reiterated the importance of strengthening the relationship between the European Union and the Republic of South Africa through the establishment of a long-term framework of co-operation that will assist South Africa during and beyond its current transitional phase. The Council noted the resumption of negotiations in January 1997 and will consider taking advantage of the facilitating clause of article 364 of the revised Lomé IV convention, which would allow early accession without further ratification. The Council recalled its commitment that the qualified accession of South Africa to the Lomé convention will not negatively affect the interests of the current ACP membership.

The Council discussed the overseas countries and territories mid-term review but was unable to reach agreement. The Council concluded that it would return to this at a future meeting.

The Council called for an immediate ceasefire for humanitarian purposes in the Great Lakes region and reaffirmed the European Union's support for regional efforts to find a political solution and for the democratisation process in Zaire, noting the appointment of the Portuguese nominee, Mr. Vasconcelos, as head of the electoral unit in Kinshasa. It also asked for the Political Committee to examine the scope for a regional arms embargo. The Council welcomed the five point plan contained in UN Security Council resolution 1097 and the appointment of Mr. Mohammed Sahnoun as UN–Organisation of African Unity special representative to the Great Lakes region. It supported the efforts of African leaders, in particular President Mandela and welcomed their decision to hold a regional summit on 12 March in Nairobi.

The Council discussed the economic situation in the Balkans, in particular the difficulties of the countries in transition in south eastern Europe and noted the measures

already taken by the European Commission to alleviate the consequences of the current crisis in Bulgaria. The Council agreed to follow the situation closely.

The Council had an exchange of views on Albania and the possibilities for the Union to contribute to a solution to the present crisis. The Council agreed that a joint senior officials' mission with the European Commission would deliver a message reporting its concerns to the Albanian Government and the Opposition leadership.

The Council discussed the situation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in light of the fact-finding mission carried out by the presidency and the Commission in Belgrade on 20 February 1997. While acknowledging that the results of the elections of 17 November 1996 have been implemented, the council reiterated the need to implement the remaining parts of the Gonzalez report; the opening of a dialogue with the opposition on free access to the media and reform of the electorial law. The Council expressed concern about the situation in Kosovo and called upon the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to co-operate in the early implementation of a visit to the region by the special representative of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe chairman-in-office, Mr. Van der Stoel, and the chairman of the working group on ethnic and national communities and minorities, Ambassador Lutz. The Council agreed to return to these issues at its next session.

The Council underlined the importance of implementing the decision on Brcko and expressed its full support for the high representative in this context. Recalling the importance of the regional approach, the Council welcomed the European Commission's report on the practical application of conditionality and called for relevant Council bodies to continue to examine this principle in preparation for further discussion at the next General Affairs Council.

The Council noted the report of the fact-finding mission to Belarus and agreed with its recommendations. It asked the head of the mission, Mr Kosto, to pass the report's contents to Mr Lukashenko, President of Belarus.

The Council discussed human rights in China and reaffirmed its willingness to continue a dialogue with China on this issue. The Council hoped progress would be achieved. Meanwhile, it invited the presidency to continue and intensify, in close co-operation with others, consultations and preparations already underway for the possible tabling of a resolution on human rights in China in the UN Commission for Human Rights in Geneva. A decision will be taken in the light of the development of the situation.

Under any other business, the Commission's paper on preferential trade agreements was raised. The Council noted this for discussion at the March General Affairs Council.

The 10th ministerial meeting of the intergovernmental conference was held on the afternoon of Monday 24 February, preceded as usual by an exchange of views with the President of the European Parliament. Discussion focused on the presidency's text on justice and home affairs. I made it clear that the real requirement was to provide for more efficient practical co-operation against, for example, criminals, drugs, illegal immigration and terrorism: there was no added value in institutional change that simply extended the role of Community institutions and procedures in the third pillar. I emphasised the practical progress that had been made in the third pillar during the last five years, and the need to build on this.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Medical Examinations (Video-recording)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances video-recording occurs of prisoners undergoing examination in medical facilities within Her Majesty's prisons. [16356]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 28 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the circumstances in which video recording of prisoners undergoing medical examination may occur in prison in England and Wales.

It is not our normal practice to permit the video recording of prisoners undergoing medical examination. Exceptionally video recordings have been made during psychotherapeutic sessions to assist the therapeutic process. These recordings were made by the psychiatrist with the knowledge and consent of the individual prisoners concerned.

Whitemoor Prison (Escape)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which account relating to the escape of six prisoners from Whitemoor prison on the evening of 9 September 1994 has been logged as the official account; [17126]

(2) how many different accounts have been given by prison officers relating to the escape of six prisoners from Whitemoor prison; and if he will make a statement; [17127]

(3) at what time the escape at Whitemoor prison on 9 September 1994 commenced; and at what time the video taped recordings of the escape began; [17128]

(4) in whose custody is the video tape from camera 27 recording part of the escape of six prisoners from Whitemoor prison on 9 September 1994; and if he will make a statement; [17129]

(5) if the assistant governor of Whitemoor prison entered the control room at 20:15 hours on 9 September 1994; [17130]

(6) why the second officer in the control room of Whitemoor prison on the evening of 9 September 1994 during the escape of six prisoners was not called to give evidence to *(a)* the police and *(b)* the Woodcock inquiry team. [17131]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answers 25 February 1997]:* The circumstances surrounding the escape from Her Majesty's prison Whitemoor on 9 September 1994 were the subject of a full inquiry by Sir John Woodcock. He was asked to report his conclusions and make recommendations on any action that should be taken to avoid any recurrence. The report of Sir John Woodcock's

inquiry was published on 19 December 1994 and a copy is available in the Library. The actual escape and the shooting of a prison officer were the subject of a separate criminal investigation by the Cambridgeshire constabulary.

I understand that neither Sir John Woodcock nor the Cambridgeshire constabulary was able to establish the precise time at which the escape began. However, it appears that staff in the emergency control room became aware of the escape at about 8:09pm and that video recording of the camera footage was manually activated shortly afterwards. The duty governor entered the emergency control room at approximately 8:15pm. I understand that none of the three video recorders in operation in the emergency control room that evening recorded images from camera 27.

The conduct of the Woodcock inquiry and of the police investigation are matters for Sir John Woodcock and the Cambridgeshire constabulary respectively. However, I understand that all five members of staff in the emergency control room at the time of the escape were interviewed by the Cambridgeshire constabulary.

Belmarsh Prison (Books and Periodicals)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons prisoners held in the special secure unit at HM prison Belmarsh have been informed that from 1 March they will not be allowed to receive books, magazines and newspapers. [17912]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Keven McNarmara, dated 28 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about prisoners held in the special secure unit at Belmarsh prison.

Prisoners in the special secure unit (SSU) at Belmarsh will not be prevented from receiving books, newspapers and magazines from 1 March. The change in procedure from 1 March, which applies to all prisoners at Belmarsh and not just those in the SSU, involves a restriction on the volume of combustible material held by prisoners in cells, and a restriction on the source through which prisoners may acquire newspapers and magazines.

These changes have been introduced to (a) reduce the risk of fire from accumulated material in cells; (b) improved security and the checking of incoming mail; and (c) speed up the distribution of publications to prisoners.

Prisoners were informed of these changes on 5 February and supplied with details of an authorised newsagent with whom they can place orders. The procedures also allow for the supply of magazines or newspapers from overseas for foreign nationals.

Metropolitan Police Manpower

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's analysis supporting his oral answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column 1036, that more than 800 extra constables have been made available to Metropolitan police divisions for operational duties since 1992; and what functions have been taken into account in compiling the figures. [17894]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* The figure which I used in my oral answer was derived from the data set out below.

Actual number of uniformed constables posted to division:

1 April 1992: 13,441

31 January 1997: 14,257

Increase: 816.

The 1992 figure excludes officers on court duty who appeared on divisional strength, but are now assigned to headquarters.

Roisin McAliskey

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Roisin McAliskey's *(a)* father and *(b)* mother will be able to be present at her confinement. [17911]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 28 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the attendance of Ms Roisin McAliskey's father and mother at her confinement.

Women prisoners are permitted to be accompanied by a birthing partner during their confinement. This policy applies equally to Roisin McAliskey as to other prisoners.

Ms McAliskey has asked for two close relatives to be present. This has been agreed subject to the policy of the hospital in which she will give birth.

Policing (London)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of policing levels in London; which areas he has assessed as being *(a)* over-policed and *(b)* under-policed; and if he will make a statement. [16221]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* The deployment of officers across London, in order to meet the agreed objectives set in the annual policing plan and to use police resources most effectively to combat crime in the capital, is a matter for the Commissioner and his senior officers. My right hon. and learned Friend and I regularly meet the Commissioner to discuss, among other matters, the performance of the Metropolitan police. I look forward to seeing the Commissioner's annual report on the Metropolitan police's performance during 1996–97.

My assessment is that policing levels in London continue to improve. Since 1979, the Government have approved increases in Metropolitan police spending worth nearly 90 per cent. in real terms. The settlement for 1997–98 provides an extra £55 million over the 1996–97 allocation. This represents a 3.4 per cent. increase. The Commissioner, in welcoming the settlement, said that it would enable him to increase officer strength during 1997 to at leat 27,400. He then aims to hold that level to the end of the financial year. Latest nationally published statistics from the Audit Commission show spending on policing in the Metropolitan police district of £211 per head of population, compared with the national average

of £100. The figure in Surrey is around £105 per head of population. Audit Commission statistics also show that the number of police officers available for ordinary duty per 1,000 per population is 3.5 in the Metropolitan police district, well above the national average of 2.1.

There are now around 4,500 more police officers in the Metropolitan police than there were in 1979. This is an increase of 20 per cent. More uniformed constables are now deployed to divisions than at the time of the last election. Moreover, a higher proportion of their time is spent on street duties: 35 per cent. compared to 32 per cent. in 1992 and 26 per cent. in 1984. The Commissioner's restructuring exercise has slimmed down headquarters staffing levels, releasing hundreds of officers for front-line duties.

The Metropolitan police's operational performance continues to improve. The number of recorded notifiable offences has fallen by over 10 per cent. since 1992–93. Successful campaigns to target burglars, Operation Bumblebee, and street robbery, Operation Eagle Eye, have been complemented by Operation Crackdown, targeting the illegal supply and demand for drugs. These three offences, which impact so seriously on the quality of life for Londoners, feature as three of the six objectives in the agreed policing plan for 1996–97. The inclusion of drugs as an agreed objective for 1996–97 is a direct response to the Government White Paper, "Tackling Drugs Together". Figures from the Metropolitan police show that homicides are now at their lowest level since 1981. There were 132 murders in the capital in 1996—down 25 per cent. since 1991. Domestic burglary has fallen by 20 per cent. since 1991 and the overall clear-up rate has risen from one in six in 1991 to nearly one in four in the 12 months to November 1996. Moreover, the results from Operation Eagle eye indicate a slowing down in the growth of street robbery and an increase in the detection rate from 10 per cent. to 19 per cent. The latest Audit Commission report also shows that Londoners enjoy the best emergency response from their police of any major city in the country.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* police constables in the Metropolitan police were (i) budgeted for and (ii) in post in March of each year since 1992; and what are the (1) numbers budgeted for and (2) estimated numbers in post for March 1997. [16217]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* The information requested is given in the table. The Commissioner, in welcoming the settlement for 1997–98, said that it would enable him to increase officer strength during 1997 to 27,400. He will then aim to maintain that level for the rest of the financial year.

Year	Police establishment at 31 March[1]		Actual strength at 31 March	
	Total	Constables	Total	Constables
1992	28,471	21,495	28,484	21,142
1993	28,308	21,388	28,290	21,031
1994	28,274	21,463	28,135	21,208
1995	28,099	21,316	27,945	21,433
1996	[1]—	[1]—	27,834	21,588
1997 March[2]	[1]—	[1]—	27,185	20,989
1997 September[2]	[1]—	[1]—	27,400	21,190

[1] The police establishment provided up to 31 March 1995 was that set annually by the Home Secretary. Since 1 April 1995, the settlement for all police forces has been based on the new national funding formula covering total resources. Police establishments are no longer set centrally.
[2] Estimated.

Young Offenders

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons aged under 18 years were charged with a criminal offence in 1996 in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales. [17697]

Mr. Maclean: Data on the number of people charged are not collected centrally.

However, 1995 the latest available prosecution data for indictable offences by age and area are published in "Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1995 Supplementary Volume 3"—tables S3.3(B) and S3.3(C).

Copies are available in the Library.

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16798]

Mr. Howard: The number of questions answered by the Home Office in each Session since 1982–83 is:

Session	Written	Oral (including supplementaries)	Total
1982–83	1,471	260	1,731
1983–84	3,512	431	3,943
1984–85	3,092	367	3,459
1985–86	3,466	325	3,791
1986–87	2,005	223	2,228
1987–88	3,846	414	4,260
1988–89	3,549	274	3,823
1989–90	3,252	212	3,464
1990–91	2,245	238	2,483
1991–92	1,351	134	1,485
1992–93	4,345	361	4,706
1993–94	3,348	267	3,615
1994–95	3,187	278	3,465
1995–96	2,831	217	3,048

Figures for 1979–80 and 1981–82 are not available.

The remainder of the information requested by the hon. Member could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

EU Citizens (Employment Applications)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his target period for dealing with European Union citizens' applications to register as exercising their economic rights by working in the United Kingdom; and to what extent the target is being met. [18089]

Mr. Kirkhope: Targets are set for the issue of residence permits to European Economic Area nationals under the provisions of the various European Community rights of residence directives. Performance against the

targets is published in the annual report of the immigration and nationality directorate. Performance in 1995–96 was as follows:

Completion target[1]	*Performance*
60 per cent. in 1 month	35 per cent.
80 per cent. in 2 months	63 per cent.
100 per cent. in 6 months	94 per cent.

[1] From date of receipt of application.

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17068]

Mr. Howard: The cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that have been reported as stolen or are otherwise unaccounted for in 1996–97 are:

Equipment/furniture	*Value* £
25 items below £5,000	13,046
Information technology equipment	
27 items below £5,000	31,488
Items stolen costing £5,000 or more	
5 vehicles stolen (in separate incidents)	47,203
1 portable personnel computer	5,400
Total value of losses	97,137

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency set up by his Department since the start of April 1992. [16975]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office has set up two executive agencies since April 1992: the Prison Service and the Fire Service College.

Much of the work involved in establishing these agencies was absorbed within the normal duties of officials and the costs were not separately recorded. A dedicated unit was, however, established in the Prison Service to prepare for agency status. Its estimated salary cost was £220,000.

Police Officers (Secondment to Department)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many serving police officers are currently on secondment to his Department. [17623]

Mr. Maclean: The most recent figures relate to October 1996, when there were 682 police officers seconded to the Home Office, comprising two chief constables, nine assistant chief constables, two commanders, 71 superintendents, 52 chief inspectors, 90 inspectors, 237 sergeants and 219 police constables, of whom 50 per cent. are in the national directorate of police training and a further 30 per cent. in the National Criminal Intelligence Service.

Prisons (Rule 43)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prison inmates were on rule 43 at their own request on 17 February. [17588]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 28 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prison inmates were on Rule 43 at their own request on 17 February.

The latest available information is for 31 January 1997. On that day there were 758 males and 18 females held on Prison Rule 43 or Young Offender Institution Rule 46 for their own interest or protection.

Prisons (Drug Testing)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list each organisation short-listed for the contract to perform mandatory drug testing, indicating the interval each proposes between a mandatory drug test being carried out and the prison authorities being informed of the result, and the proposed cost per test; [17492]

(2) when is the next round of tendering for drug testing in prisons scheduled to take place. [17494]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters have been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 28 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the organisations short-listed for the contract to perform mandatory drug testing, their proposed costs and turnaround times, and when the next round of tendering for the drug testing contract will take place.

The organisations which were short-listed in 1995 for the mandatory drug testing contract were:

The Laboratory of the Government Chemist

The Forensic Science Service

The tendering specification required that screening results should be communicated to individual prisons within two days of receipt of samples by the contractor. Both those short-listed confirmed their ability to meet such a timetable. Prices submitted by bidders must be treated as commercially restricted.

The contract was awarded to the Laboratory of the Government Chemist in December 1995. This has a review date of 1 April 1997, with provision for extension for up to a further two years. No decision has yet been taken about when the next tendering exercise will be held.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average interval between a mandatory drug test being carried out and the prison authorities being informed of the test result; [17491]

(2) if he will list each organisation which carried out drug testing for the Prison Service before the contract to perform mandatory drug testing was awarded; what was *(a)* the average length of time between a drug test being carried out and the prison authorities being informed of the result for each organisation and *(b)* the cost per test. [17493]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 28 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about which organisations carried out drug testing for the Prison Service prior to the award of the present contract, the interval between a mandatory drug test being carried out and the prison authorities being informed of the result, and the cost per test.

Prior to the award of a contract to the Laboratory of the Government Chemist in December 1995, all laboratory urine analysis for the mandatory drug testing programme was carried out by two companies: Medscreen and Scientifics.

The average length of time between a prisoner's sample being taken at the establishment and the screening test taking place at the laboratory is estimated as four days for Scientifics, four days for Medscreen and seven days for LGC. It is important to note that establishments may store samples in a refrigerator for up to seven days awaiting a sufficient number to justify calling out a courier. The Prison Service requirement is that the interval between receipt of the sample at the laboratory and notifying the outcome of the screening test to the prison should be no more than two working days; in the majority of cases that is met.

It would be inappropriate to disclose the costs of testing; to do so would be likely to prejudice a future tendering competition.

Prisoners (Birth)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners gave birth in each year since 1992 *(a)* by the prison in which each woman was held immediately prior to giving birth and *(b)* in total. [17498]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 28 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of women prisoners who have given birth each year since 1992.

Information collected about births was not recorded by individual prison establishment before 1994–95.

The tables attached summarise the numbers of babies born to women prisoners *(a)* in each year since 1994 by individual prisons and *(b)* in each year since 1991–92 in total.

Table 1: Number of babies born to women prisoners by prison

Prison	1994–95	1995–96
Askham Grange	13	[1]12
Holloway	31	32
Low Newton	1	1
New Hall	2	7
Risley	5	4
Styal	11	8
Total	63	64

[1] Includes a set of twins.

Table 2: Number of babies born to women prisoners in total

	Number
1991–92	56
1992–93	29
1993–94	56
1994–95	63
1995–96	64

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners gave birth in each year since 1992 while in prison; and in which establishments these births occurred. [17499]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 28 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of women prisoners who have given birth while in prison in each year since 1992.

It is very rare for a woman prisoner to give birth in prison. The normal practice is to move the prisoner to a National Health Service hospital when she is in labour.

The most recent case of a woman giving birth in prison was at Risley prison on 23 February 1997 and prior to that at Styal prison in 1993.

New Prisons (Construction)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new prisons are at present under construction; where they are sited; and when they are due to be commissioned. [17586]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 28 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about new prisons.

There are three new prisons under construction using the Private Finance Initiative, as follows:

Name of prison	Location	Type	Number of places	Planned opening date
HMP Altcourse	Liverpool	Category B local	600	January 1998
HMP Lowdham Grange	Nottingham	Category B training	500	February 1998
HMP Parc	Bridgend	Category B local	800	November 1997

Prisoners (Restraints)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prisoners were put under restraint in each year since 1992 (i) by prison (ii) by prison type, and (iii) in total. [17497]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 28 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners put under restraint in each year since 1992.

This information is not collected centrally. It could only be made available at disproportionate cost.

Prisons (Babies)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many babies have been held in each prison in each year since 1992; and what was the average amount of time they were held in each prison. [17495]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 28 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of babies which have been held in each prison in each year since 1992; and the average amount of time they were held in prison. The information you have requested is given in the attached table.

Number of babies held in each prison in each year since 1992, and the average amount of time they were held in each prison

	1992		1993		1994		1995		1996		1997	
	Number of babies held each year	Average amount of time they were held	Number of babies held each year	Average amount of time they were held	Number of babies held each year	Average amount of time they were held	Number of babies held each year	Average amount of time they were held	Number of babies held each year	Average amount off time they were held	Number of babies held up to 24 February 1997	Average amount of time they were held
Styal mother and baby unit	20	12 months	27	12 months	22	9 months	25	8 months	26	9 months	4	[2]—
Holloway mother and baby unit	Figures not collected until January 1993		25	5 months	48	6 months	40	6 months	29	5 months	9	[2]—
Askham Grange mother and baby unit	29	5 months	32	6 months	32	8 months	42	5 months	38	5 months	5	[2]—
New Hall mother and baby unit (Unit opened May 1995)	—	—	—	—	—	—	[1]20	3 months	18	4 months	2	[2]—
Total	49		84		102		127		111		20	

[1] May to December 1995.
[2] Average length of stay for 1997 not yet available.

Police Custody Deaths

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the results of the Police Complaints Authority analysis into deaths in police custody which occurred during 1994; and if he will make a statement on his plans for a further two-year study. [17522]

Mr. Maclean: The data collected by the Police Complaints Authority into deaths in police custody during 1994 are incomplete but have been provided to the Home Office police research group which has recently commenced an in-depth study of deaths in police custody. This work will analyse available records of all such deaths from 1990 to the most recent. It is anticipated that the results from this research will be published late in 1997.

Prison Visitors (Searches)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons seeking to visit a prison inmate during 1996 were *(a)* on being searched, found in possession of illegal drugs and *(b)* subsequently charged with an offence; and if he will make a statement. [17585]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 28 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of persons seeking to visit a prison inmate during 1996 who were *(a)* on being searched, found in possession of illegal drugs and *(b)* subsequently charged with an offence.

A total of 1312 visitors to prisoners during 1996 were reported to the police because they were suspected of being in possession of illegal drugs. Figures on the number of prisoners who were subsequently charged with a criminal offence are not recorded by the Prison Service centrally.

London Prisons (Drug Finds)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug finds were made in each of the London prisons during 1996. [17587]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 28 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of drug finds made in each of the London prisons during 1996.

The number of drug finds reported to Prison Service Headquarters for the London prisons during 1996 were:

	Number
Belmarsh	10
Brixton	92
Feltham	309
Holloway	103
Pentonville	95
Wandsworth	160
Wormwood Scrubs	193

HEALTH

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the oral statement of the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), of 10 February, *Official Report,* column 119, on Department of Health and Medical Research Council funding of multiple sclerosis over the last six years, if he will reconcile that statement with the answer to the hon. Member for Pendle of 10 December 1996, *Official Report,* column *151,* setting out Department of Health and MRC funding on MS. [15897]

Mr. Burns *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* I regret that, due to a clerical error, the figure quoted in the oral statement on 10 February 1997 at column 119 should have been just over £1 million and not the figure of £2 million used.

The hon. Member may be interested to know that the Medical Research Council also spent £6,280,000 in 1995–96 on research under the broader headings of autoimmune disorders and diseases of the central nervous system and is providing £4.9 million in core and capital building funding, and £1,840,000 for on-going research, for the MRC interdisciplinary centre in brain repair, Cambridge which carries out work on neurodegenerative diseases in a multidisciplinary environment.

Cold-related Illnesses

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what have been the excess winter treatment rates for cold-relates illnesses by general practitioners in each of the past 10 years. [17471]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people received hospital treatment as *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients for cold-related illnesses for December 1996 and January 1997; and what were the figures for the same period in each of the last 10 years. [17383]

Mr. Horam: For the purpose of this question, "cold related conditions" have been defined as pneumonia, influenza, bronchitis and hypothermia. The information available for in-patients is shown in the table and covers the period 1989–90 to 1994–95. Data for out-patients are not available centrally.

"Cold related conditions" in December and January—main diagnosis.
Estimated number of Finished Consultant Episodes (FCEs), ordinary admissions and day cases combined, NHS hospitals, England

	Pneumonia	*Influenza*	*Bronchitis*	*Hypothermia*	*Total*[1]
December 1989	13,469	2,327	2,147	216	18,159
January 1990	7,684	413	1,370	136	9,603
December 1990	8,418	150	1,183	239	9,989
January 1991	7,778	213	1,162	262	9,415
December 1991	9,404	188	1,302	205	11,098
January 1992	8,759	337	1,108	171	10,375
December 1992	7,425	80	1,021	239	8,766
January 1993	7,973	88	1,110	151	9,322
December 1993	10,023	401	1,301	202	11,927
January 1994	8,018	108	1,115	159	9,399
December 1994	9,197	83	1,270	195	10,745
January 1995	8,842	140	1,237	218	10,437

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES):

ICD9 code 480–486 (Pneumonia); 487 (Influenza); 490–491 (Bronchitis); 991.6 (Hypothermia).

[1] Some totals do not add up because of rounding.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people received treatment by NHS doctors for cold-related illnesses for the period December 1996 and January 1997; and what were the figures for the same months in each of the last 10 years. [17393]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the information in the replies given to him today on cold-related illnesses.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the excess winter hospital treatment rates for cold-related illnesses for *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients in each of the last 10 years. [17380]

Mr. Horam: Data in the form of excess winter treatment rates are not available centrally.

Nursing and Midwifery Students

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study (i) qualified and (ii) registered with the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting in each of the last five years. [17677]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for England for the information that is available on the numbers entering training and qualifying, and to the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for the information that is available on the numbers of qualified nurses who registered with the council.

Second-level Registered Nurses

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current number of second-level registered nurses; and how many are undertaking training to convert to first-level registration. [17678]

Mr. Horam: There were 34,470 whole-time equivalent second level nursing midwifery and health visiting staff employed by the national health service hospital and community health services in England as at 30 September 1995—the latest available figures.

The number of second level registered nurses undertaking training to convert to first level registration is not centrally available. I refer the hon. Member to the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting who record information relating to student nurse numbers.

NHS Non-clinical Managers

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of non-clinical managers in the NHS earning over £30,000 per year were women in each year since 1991. [17679]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally. In September 1995, 50.9 per cent. of administrative managers employed by the hospital and community health services in England were female.

Mental Health

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on mental health in *(a)* the acute and *(b)* the community sector in each health authority area in each of the last three years. [17682]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not available centrally.

Emergency Patients

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many emergency patients were transported more than 50 miles to receive hospital treatment in each of the last 18 months; and how many subsequently died. [17684]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of new variant CJD have occurred in each year since 1990, broken down by age groups and local authority areas. [17801]

Mr. Horam: The total number of definite and probable cases of new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease which have occurred since 1990 is 16, of which three died in 1995, 10 died in 1996 and three are still alive. The age range at death is from 19 to 50. The release of detailed data on the age and geographical location of the cases would, given the small numbers involved, put at risk the confidentiality of patients and their families. Cases of nvCJD have been found throughout the United Kingdom, and the distribution of cases of nvCJD by geographical location does not suggest a significant excess in any particular area.

Forest Healthcare Trust

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what rate of return on assets has been produced by the Forest Healthcare trust in each year since its establishment. [18083]

Mr. Horam: The rates of return of Forest Healthcare national health service trust are as follows:

Year	*Percentage*
1992–93	10.7
1993–94	4.5
1994–95	5.8
1995–96	2.9

Ecstasy

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has received from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of drugs about the dangers of taking the drug known as Ecstasy; and if he will make a statement. [18598]

Mr. Burns: The Government have received advice from the council on this matter.

The council takes the view that the unpredictability of the effects of taking Ecstasy—MDMA—including the possibility of death, means that there is cause for serious concern about the risks involved.

The council advises that, in contrast to the desired effects of the drug, there have also been regular reports of serious short-term effects. First-ever epileptic fits, panic attacks, paranoid states and confusional episodes are well known and often seen in some accident and emergency departments. These short-term disorders are potentially serious, although they are usually amenable to treatment.

The council reports that long-term effects which have been observed include permanent visual changes, depression and panic attacks. Some individuals will be at risk of developing psychotic illness.

Post mortems on some individuals who have died in circumstances associated with the drug have suggested direct damage to the liver and heart. The deaths which have occurred have been unpredictable and sporadic and seen usually to have been brought on either by hypothermia—overheating—and the complications which follow or, very rarely, through excessive water consumption which has led to acute water intoxication.

The council advises that other similar drugs such as MDA or MDEA may well carry similar or greater risks. Misuse of Ecstasy in combination with other drugs or alcohol will have a tendency to increase the risks. The risks of dehydration and overheating are likely to be exaggerated by high ambient temperatures and crowding.

The council advises that Ecstasy tablet seized in this country have not contained other harmful substances. The harmful effects are as a result of MDMA itself.

The Department, through the Health Education Authority, is using the advice of the council to inform its drug prevention campaign, as part of the Government's drugs strategy, "Tackling Drugs Together". The advice will also be used to inform the forthcoming advice to local authorities on improving the health and safety of young people at clubs and similar venues.

Disabled Parents

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued, and what funding his Department provides to meet the needs of disabled parents. [18124]

Mr. Burns: Social services departments are empowered to provide services for disabled parents as disabled people through a range of welfare legislation, including under section 17(1)(a) of the Children Act 1989. "The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations" volume II, paragraph 2.5 refers to that. Apart from this, the Department of Health has not produced specific guidance on the welfare legislation's application to disabled parents, but believes that the provisions are available to social services departments to use as appropriate, taking account of local and individual circumstances and priorities.

The total resources provided for social services in England will increase by a further 4 per cent. next year to £7.7 billion, 73 per cent. more in real terms than in 1990–91. It is for local authorities to manage and to decide on the allocation of these substantial resources in accordance with local circumstances and their own priorities.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to commission research into the numbers of disabled parents. [18120]

Mr. Burns: The Department of Health, through its research and development programme, is funding the research initiative, "Supporting Parents: How to Mobilise Supports to Promote Better Parenting", with a local budget of £2.5 million. One of the funded projects, which will begin work in May 1988, is "Parenting and Disability: The Role of Formal and Informal Supports". This will look fully at the types and amounts of both formal and informal support that is needed to support disabled people in their role as parents.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics he collates on the number of disabled parents *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in each local authority. [18125]

Mr. Burns: Routine statistics are not collected from local authorities on this topic. However, information on the presence of long-standing illness or disability within households is included in the "Health Survey for England".

Glaucoma

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions for the treatment of glaucoma were issued in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what was the net ingredient cost for each year. [16601]

Mr. Malone: The table provides information on the number of prescriptions dispensed, and their net ingredient cost. The rate of growth is in line with the rates for other medicines for conditions associated in particular with elderly people.

Number of prescription items dispensed and net ingredient cost of drugs used in the treatment of glaucoma: England 1991 to 1995

England

Year	*Prescription items (millions)*	*Net ingredient cost (£ millions)*
1991	2.9	21.7
1992	3.1	23.2
1993	3.3	24.5
1994	3.4	25.4
1995	3.5	26.3

1. The data cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered.

2. The drugs used in the treatment of glaucoma are those preparations in the British National Formulary (BNF) [issue 28, September 1994] therapeutic group 11.6—treatment of glaucoma. Some of these drugs may have been prescribed for other conditions.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients *(a)* by region and *(b)* nationally received hospital in-patient or day care treatment for glaucoma in each of the last five years. [16602]

Mr. Horam: The latest available information for finished consultant episodes is set out in the table. Information on numbers of patients is not available centrally.

Finished consultant episodes—Glaucoma, England

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Northern RHA	1,241	1,295	1,502	1,879	1,518
Yorkshire RHA	1,193	1,527	1,662	2,123	1,854
Trent RHA	1,822	1,869	1,895	2,214	2,049
East Anglian RHA	953	911	839	1,031	1,148
North-west Thames RHA	746	1,099	1,116	1,152	934
North-east Thames RHA	673	703	646	904	2,928
South-east Thames RHA	1,113	1,397	1,987	1,871	1,584
South-west Thames RHA	847	1,072	1,186	1,271	1,126
Wessex RHA	1,192	1,296	1,345	1,581	1,416
Oxford RHA	809	860	1,003	1,304	1,572
South Western RHA	1,437	1,553	1,668	1,983	1,998
West Midlands RHA	1,897	2,144	2,511	2,372	2,538
Mersey RHA	828	1,074	1,071	1,446	1,462
North Western RHA	1,928	2,275	2,894	3,131	2,999
SHAS	794	894	1,416	1,616	—
	—	—	—	—	—
England total	17,474	19,967	22,941	25,880	25,125

Notes:
Figures include ordinary admissions and day cases in NHS hospitals, are rounded and may not total.
Data in this table is grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.
Finished consultant episodes are defined as the period that a patient spends under the continuous care of a specific consultant in a specific health care provider (which may be in more than one hospital within that health care provider).
Special Health Authorities (SHAs) were abolished on 1 April 1994.
Source:
Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES).

Operations (Cancellations)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library figures *(a)* by district health authority, *(b)* by regional health authority and *(c)* in total, of the number of operations cancelled on the day of, or the day after, admission to hospital and the number of those patients who were not readmitted within a month for the third quarter of 1996–97. [16603]

Mr. Horam: The information will be placed in the Library shortly.

Nurses (Training)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study gave up their training in (i) the first year, (ii) the second year and (iii) the third year, in each of the last five years. [16604]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 20 February at column *703*.

Long-term Care (Legislation)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about his proposed draft Bill for long-term care; what conclusions he has now reached concerning the financial aspects of his proposals; and when he intends to publish the draft Bill. [16982]

Mr. Burns: A policy statement to follow up the consultation paper, "A New Partnership for Care in Old Age", and a draft Bill will be published shortly.

Buckinghamshire Health Authority

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the funding of Buckinghamshire health authority over the last three years. [18229]

Mr. Horam: The final cash limits for Buckinghamshire district health authority for the last three years are as follows.

	£000
1993–94	190,475
1994–95	196,860
1995–96	202,365

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reasons for his decision that Buckinghamshire health authority's deficit should be recouped by 31 March 1998 rather than the date originally planned. [18228]

Mr. Malone: All health authorities must remain within their allocated annual cash limit. However, a health authority might report in its accruals accounts a deficit position. In this situation it must agree a recovery plan with the national health service executive regional office to regain financial equilibrium. The plan could be reassessed to take account of changed circumstances.

Health Authority Finance

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in rank order health authorities in England showing in each case the amount in both cash

and percentage terms by which that authority's planned funding for 1997–98 exceeds or falls below its capitation target; and if he will make a statement. [18227]

Mr. Horam: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Prescriptions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many investigations are proceeding into allegations of transfer of prescriptions by multiple pharmacies from the pharmacy branch which received them for processing at another branch *(a)* in the same health authority and *(b)* in another health authority to maximise the professional practice allowance. [18121]

Mr. Malone: Comprehensive information about such cases is not held centrally. Cases may be investigated by both health authorities and the Prescription Pricing Authority fraud investigation unit. Enquiries made of the PPA fraud investigation unit indicate that no current investigations are known to be underway.

WALES

Pupil Exclusions (Clwyd)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the *(a)* permanent and *(b)* temporary pupils exclusions in the former local education authority of Clwyd for the years 1993 to 1996; and if he will make a statement. [16951]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Returns from the former Clwyd county council show that, in the academic year 1994–95, there were 81 permanent exclusions from maintained schools in the authority. In 1995–96, a total of 101 permanent exclusions were reported by Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire and Conwy unitary authorities. Information in respect of earlier years and fixed term exclusions is not available centrally.

High Technology Companies

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many high technology companies have been attracted to Wales since 1992 giving their locations; and if he will make a statement. [17502]

Mr. Hague: Since January 1992, over 800 inward investment projects have been attracted to Wales promising over 40,000 new jobs, over 26,000 safeguarded jobs and capital investment of over £6.8 billion. The projects cover a wide range of activities which might be defined as high technology and include projects by the following companies:

Company	*Destination*
General Electric	Nantgarw
Angrisense	Treforest
Surface Technology Systems	Imperial Park
Polyclonal Antibodies	Llandysul
Nimbus Records	Cwmbran
Xidex	Brynmawr
Bayer Diagnostic	Bridgend
Align-Rite	Bridgend
British Aerospace	Broughton
British Airways	Rhoose
Ford	Bridgend
Perkin Elmer	Llantrisant
Newport Wafer-Fab	Newport
LG	Imperial Park
ASAT	Crumlin
Northern Telecom	Newport
Raytheon	Broughton
Hoya	Wrexham
Pilkington Micronics	Deeside

Unemployment (Clywd)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many long-term unemployed men and women there are in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* in the area covered by the former county of Clywd. [17504]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Long-term unemployment, January 1997[1]

	Male	*Female*
Clwyd	3,024	650
Wales	26,568	4,931

Source:
Office for National Statistics.
[1] Claimant unemployed for 52 weeks or over. These figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Youth Unemployment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many unemployed people there currently are in Wales aged 24 years and under. [17505]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In January 1997, there were 27,894 people in Wales on the claimant unemployment count aged 24 and under. This figure is not seasonally adjusted.

River Dee Estuary

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the impact upon the *(a)* Deeside communities and *(b)* the River Dee estuary environment of proposed construction of a power station. [17506]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Any developer of a power station with a generating capacity in excess of 50 mw is required to supply an environmental impact assessment in support of its application. The assessment needs to include an analysis of the effects upon the local communities and environment.

Aerospace and Air Passenger Transport Industries

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his current estimate of the number of jobs connected with the aerospace and air passenger transport industries in Wales. [17503]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: According to the latest annual employment survey there were 48,000 employees in the aerospace and air transport industries[1] in Wales in September 1995.

[1] 1992 standard industrial classification, classes 35.30, 62.10–62.20, 63.11 and 63.23.

Prescriptions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, columns *91–92*, if he will seek out the procedure for a health authority investigation of allegations of transfer of prescriptions from one branch of a multiple pharmacy in another health authority area for processing in another branch in the area of the first health authority for the purpose of making a fraudulent claim for the professional practice allowances for community pharmacies; what provisions govern the obtaining of evidence from individual patients named on the prescription forms; and what assessment he has made of the ways in which the investigation procedure could be simplified. [18128]

Mr. Hague: The detailed procedure would be a matter for the health authority or authorities concerned, in accordance with their own fraud policies. They are required at an appropriate stage in their investigation to notify their statutory auditors and the police. I have been advised that the same duty of confidence applies to prescription forms as to other kinds of medical record.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the Bro Taf and Gwent health authorities about adjustment to their respective budgets for 1996–97 for prescription items arising from investigations into the transfer of prescriptions from a Gwent branch of a multiple pharmacy for processing at a cardiff branch of the same pharmacy; [18122]

(2) what representations he has received from the chairman of the Bro Taf health authority and the Prescription Pricing Service about the cost of carrying out investigations into the alleged fraudulent transfer of prescriptions handed in at a Gwent branch of a multiple pharmacy to a Cardiff branch of the same pharmacy. [18115]

Mr. Hague: None.

Nursery Education

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many nursery places are available in total for pre-school children in the Cardiff area. [18230]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information is not available in the form requested. In January, there were an estimated 6,119 pupils aged under five in maintained and independent schools in the area now covered by Cardiff local education authority. In addition, at 31 March 1996, there were 4,601 places at local authority day nurseries, registered day nurseries and registered playgroups.

NHS (Private Finance Initiative)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each scheme proposed under the private finance initiative in the Welsh NHS according to the stage it has reached. [18111]

Mr. Hague: There are 27 proposals for capital schemes, above individual NHS trusts' delegated capital spending limits, for which trusts are developing business cases. Of those, the following table shows schemes for which outline business case approval has been given and the relevant trust is testing for private sector interest within the private finance initiative.

Trust scheme	*PFI position*
Glan y Mor/local general hospital Baglan	Advert places in OJEC
Powys Healthcare/Bronllys—Mid Wales Merger and Newtown hospital	Invitation to negotiate issued
East Glamorgan/Staff Residences for the new district general hospital at Ynys y Plwm	Invitation to negotiate issued
Gwynedd Community/Porthmadog community hospital	Invitation to negotiate issued
Velindre/radiotherapy equipment replacement	Invitation to negotiate issued
Glan Hafren/Chepstow neighbourhood hospital	Preferred private sector partner selected
Gwent Community/Nevill Hall mental health development	Preferred private sector partner selected
Nevill Hall/day surgery unit	Preferred private sector partner selected
University hospital for Wales/multi-storey car park and slip road	Contracts signed and under construction

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many nursery vouchers have been distributed to parents in the Cardiff area, to date. [18155]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: More than 85 per cent. of parents in Wales have already completed and returned their application forms for vouchers and the nursery voucher centre is starting to issue vouchers to them today. Figures relating to specific areas are not yet available.

SCOTLAND

Paedophiles

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with relevant individuals and bodies on the subject of the notification to statutory and other bodies of the whereabouts of paedophiles. [18215]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The crime and punishment White Paper, Cm 3302, published in June 1996 described our proposed arrangements for sex offenders to register with the police. That White Paper was widely circulated and attracted comments from a considerable number of bodies and it was debated by the Scottish Grand Committee at its sitting in Perth on 17 June 1996, when the hon. Member opened for the Opposition.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for compulsory treatment for paedophile offenders *(a)* within and *(b)* outwith prison. [18211]

Mr. Forsyth: Where an offender is not given a custodial sentence, the courts may require him, as part of a programme of probation supervision, to participate in treatment programmes. Work with offenders given a custodial sentence is carried out in a number of prisons, including Peterhead, Shotts and Barlinnie. The aims of sex offender treatment programmes are to get prisoners to accept personal responsibility for their actions, to address

the consequences of their behaviour for their victims, and to develop strategies to exercise self-control and avoid situations likely to lead to reoffending. Such programmes can be effective only if prisoners are willing to engage constructively. Prison staff strongly encourage and challenge prisoners to participate. Progression through the prison system is also dependent on addressing offending behaviour.

Offenders released from prison on licence or where a supervised release order is in force may be required, as a condition of their licence or order, to participate in treatment programmes. Failure to comply with any such condition could result in an offender's return to custody. Measures further to strengthen supervised release orders, so that they will normally be mandatory in the most serious cases of sexual abuse and will last for up to 10 years, are contained in the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill and were debated by the Committee in which the hon. Member took part.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for *(a)* giving more assistance to the victims of paedophiles and *(b)* providing them with more information about the whereabouts of their abusers. [18214]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The crime and punishment White Paper, Cm 3302, published in June 1996, outlined a range of measures to support the victims of crime, including the victims of sexual abuse. Some of those measures are already in place and others are being developed. A victims steering group has been established to advise on the development of policy and good practice towards all crime victims. The group's operations were discussed in the Committee considering the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, in which the hon. Member took part. In addition, as was announced last month, a scheme will come into effect on 1 April 1997 which will enable the victims of serious violent and sexual crimes, if they so wish, to be told of the release of their assailants from prison.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to establish a national paedophile register in Scotland. [18226]

Mr. Forsyth: The Government's plans have been clear for some time and will, subject to parliamentary approval, soon be implemented. The crime and punishment White Paper, Cm 3302, published in June 1996, noted that the Scottish Criminal Record Office already acts as a register of convicted sex offenders. That includes paedophiles. The White Paper committed the Government to require convicted sex offenders to notify the police of any change of address, so that the register can be kept fully up to date. The Sex Offenders Bill, now before the House, fulfils that commitment, as the hon. Member must be aware from his own involvement on the Committee of the Bill.

Child Abuse

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ensure that statistical information on child abuse in Scotland is compiled and published. [18217]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The latest information about child abuse cases reported under local authority child protection procedures is available in statistical bulletin No. SWK/CP/1996/2, published by the Scottish Office in October 1996. The bulletin was placed in the Libraries of both Houses and a copy was sent to the hon. Member.

Mr. William Duff

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he proposes to take to recover NHS payments made to William Duff between 1991 and 1995. [12458]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 January 1997]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already directed Greater Glasgow health board to recover the sum of £75,000 from Mr. Duff following the report of the NHS tribunal and other such directions will be following. Consideration is being given to whether any payments which were made to Mr. Duff can be recovered within the terms of the regulations.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will draw on the sums relating to outstanding fee claims withheld from Mr. William Duff to compensate his former patients. [12724]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no statutory power to draw upon sums relating to outstanding fee claims for the purpose of payment of compensation.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total earnings in fees from the NHS by Mr. William Duff in each year from the time he began practising in the Greater Glasgow health board area. [12725]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* The information requested is listed in the table:

Gross NHS general dental services item of service fees paid to Mr. William Duff 1988 to 1995

Gross earnings	*£*
Year ending December 1988	162,000
Year ending December 1989	258,000
Year ending December 1990	319,000
Year ending December 1991	373,000
Year ending December 1992	313,000
Year ending December 1993	268,000
Year ending December 1994	266,000
Year ending December 1995	1,000
Total	1,900

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date Greater Glasgow health board commenced its investigation of the fees claimed by Mr. William Duff. [12726]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* Greater Glasgow health board commenced its investigation into fees claimed by Mr. Duff on 14 April 1993 when it received the first of 27 referrals from the Scottish Dental Practice Board.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many of the patients of Mr. William Duff who were interviewed by dental referral officers have received remedial treatment; [12727]

(2) how many patients of Mr. William Duff had been told in advance what treatment was being prescribed. [12730]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* This information is not held centrally.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total number of patients who have had unnecessary treatment carried out by Mr. William Duff; how many of these have had their complaint upheld and received compensation in full; how many have been refused compensation on the grounds of their being time barred; and if he will review these cases. [12728]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* The total number of patients who have received unnecessary treatment is not available. The national health service tribunal found that in 24 cases which were the subject of referrals to Greater Glasgow health board by the Scottish dental practice division, Mr. Duff had provided unnecessary treatment. In a further two cases where complaints were considered by the health board and which were the subject of appeals to my right hon. Friend, Mr. Duff was held to have provided such treatment.

In one of the latter cases my right hon. Friend has directed that a sum be recovered from Mr. Duff for payment to the complainant to meet the cost of remedial treatment, and this has been set at the maximum contribution payable towards a course of NHS dental treatment. A similar direction is under consideration in the other case. In a total of 14 cases, complaints against Mr. Duff have not been considered by the health board's dental service committee because of the lateness of the complaint. In these circumstances, the question of compensation does not arise. There are no provisions whereby the cases which have been determined can be reviewed.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date the Dental Practice Board called in regional dental officers to investigate the claims for treatment submitted by Mr. William Duff; and if he will publish their report. [12729]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* Inspections of Mr. William Duff's patients were first undertaken by regional dental officers on 25 August 1986. On 12 December 1990, Mr. Duff was referred to a dental service committee by Greater Glasgow health board on the grounds that he had not employed a proper degree of skills and attention in respect of a patient. On that occasion, Mr. Duff was found not to be in breach of his NHS terms and conditions of service. In view of the confidentiality relating to health records, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State cannot publish the reports compiled by regional dental officers.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total level of fines imposed upon Mr. William Duff for breach of professional codes of practice; and what plans he has to impose further penalties. [12731]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* In response to the report on Mr. Duff's performance by the national health service tribunal dated 6 February 1996 my right hon. Friend directed Greater Glasgow health board to recover £75,000 from Mr. Duff by withholding from remuneration or otherwise. The board has also been directed to recover from Mr. Duff up to the maximum contribution towards the cost of a NHS course of dental treatment, at present £325, in the case of one patient. A further direction is under consideration in another case.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will order an investigation into the handling of the case of Mr. William Duff by Greater Glasgow health board. [12732]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans for such an investigation. Mr. Duff was the subject of an inquiry and report by the national health service tribunal which directed that his name should be removed from the dental list of Greater Glasgow health board and not included in the corresponding list of any other health board. My right hon. Friend drew the matter to the attention of the General Dental Council which has now barred Mr. Duff from practising dentistry. In addition, appeals in subsequent cases concerning Mr. Duff which were the subject of investigation by the health board's dental service committee have been determined by my right hon. Friend.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide financial support to Greater Glasgow health board to organise a helpline for ex-patients of William Duff. [13950]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* Greater Glasgow health board has no plans to organise a helpline for ex-patients of William Duff. The number of requests for information received from this source would not justify such an initiative.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to reply to the questions from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill of 24 and 28 January, relating to Mr. William Duff. [17392]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I replied to the hon. Member's questions today.

Dental Services

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average current charge for *(a)* a crown and *(b)* root treatment. [12623]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* Patient charges for crowns range from £36.24 to £74.32, depending on the particular tooth, the material used, whether a post is required and whether the crown is free standing or part of a bridge. Patient charges for root treatment range from £18.12 to £43.52. These charges are net of any ancillary treatment.

NHS general dental services are provided free or with partial relief to certain categories of adults and they are also provided free to children.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the limit on the number of patients any one NHS dentist can have registered with his practice. [14032]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* Patients are registered under NHS continuing care and capitation arrangements with an individual dentist and not with a dental practice. There is

no statutory limit on the number of patients a dentist may accept under these arrangements. At 31 March 1996, there was an average of 1,412 patients registered per dentist in Scotland.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review the limit on compensation to patients for mistreatment by dental practitioners. [14033]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* There is no statutory provision for such compensation, although the National Health Service (Service Committees and Tribunal) (Scotland) Regulations, as they apply to complaints made before 1 April 1996, provide for the recovery from a dentist and payment to a person of expenses which, by reason of the dentist's failure to comply with his terms of service, that person reasonably and necessarily incurs in obtaining further treatment. Any such treatment should be obtained under the national health service. The maximum patient contribution for a course of NHS treatment is currently £325.

Since 1 April 1996, the procedures for dealing with complaints and discipline have been separated following the recommendations of the review committee on NHS complaints procedures charged by Professor Alan Wilson. The regulations now deal only with discipline and any question of payment to a person by way of reimbursement of the remedial treatment or compensation would be a matter for consideration as part of the non-statutory complaints procedure.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what safeguards exist to prevent a dentist from falsifying a patient or guardian's signature on forms authorising treatment for under-16s. [14035]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* No routine practical mechanism exists at present for verifying signatures on dental payment claim forms but ad hoc checks are undertaken by the Common Services Agency's dental practice division.

Ministerial Visits

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the overseas visits of Ministers, indicating if they were accompanied by officials and the costs involved, in each of the past five years. [16500]

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[holding answer 19 February 1997]:* Ministers are always accompanied on overseas visits by at least one official. Costs of visits prior to 1995 are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Since 1992, Scottish Office Ministers have attended 28 Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Councils in Brussels or Luxembourg. The total costs of attendance at Councils in 1995 and 1996 was £34,861.70. Figures for 1997 are not yet available. In addition, Ministers also undertook the following visits to promote or represent Scotland's interests abroad:

Date	*Place*	*Minister*	*Cost (£)*
1992			
20–23 June	Thessalonika	Allan Stewart	—
12–19 September	Japan	Allan Stewart	—
12–19 September	Boston	Secretary of State	—
1993			
12 February	Munich	Lord James Douglas-Hamilton	—
25–27 March	Florida	Secretary of State	—
6–8 June	Madrid	Allan Stewart	—
17–18 June	Lille	Allan Stewart	—
17–23 September	Jedda and Dubai	Allan Stewart	—
2–9 October	USA	Allan Stewart	—
5–15 October	New York and Hong Kong	Lord James Douglas-Hamilton	—
1994			
17 February	Oslo	Sir Hector Monro	—
18 March	Holland	Lord James Douglas-Hamilton	—
26–29 May	Crete	Lord Fraser of Carmyllie	—
2–5 June	Corfu	Allan Stewart	—
8–10 June	Golansk	Allan Stewart	—
14–15 June	Munich	Allan Stewart	—
21–26 August	Canada	Sir Hector Monro	—
8–9 September	Brussels	Secretary of State	—
24 September to 2 October	USA	Secretary of State	—
24 September to 2 October	Japan	Allan Stewart	—
24 October	Paris	Sir Hector Monro	—
1995			
15–17 March	Rome	Secretary of State	1,942.80
20–21 March	Brussels	Secretary of State	1,956
26–31 August	Taiwan	George Kynoch	14,508
15–19 September	Helsinki	Lord James Douglas-Hamilton	2,309.13
24–30 September	Boston	George Kynoch	8,294
4–5 October	Cologne	Earl of Lindsay	2,017.66
8–10 October	Stockholm	Lord James Douglas-Hamilton	3,029.81
17 October	Brussels	Raymond Robertson	748.50
1–3 November	Washington	Earl of Lindsay	7,162
7–9 November	Oslo and Tromso	Raymond Robertson	2,582.40
8–10 November	Toronto and Ottawa	Earl of Lindsay	7,246.83
24 November	Madrid	George Kynoch	982
20–22 December	Brussels	Raymond Robertson	1,748.50
1996			
5 March	Brussels	Raymond Robertson	748.50
8–11 March	USA	Earl of Lindsay	10,309.10
17–19 April	USA and Canada	Secretary of State	14,379.94
24 April	Brussels	Raymond Robertson	1,094.26
15–17 May	Cannes	Earl of Lindsay	4,872.72
22–30 May	Japan/Korea	Secretary of State	30,400.90
7 June	Bremen	Raymond Robertson	1,265.73
27 August to 2 September	Atlanta	Raymond Robertson	7,246.50
5–8 October	Lativa	Raymond Robertson	1,272
22 October	Paris	Earl of Lindsay	1,199.54
25–27 November	Oslo	Raymond Robertson	1,433.86
2–3 December	Denmark	Earl of Lindsay	1,177.60
18–19 December	Dublin	Earl of Lindsay	923.30

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17071]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Six items of equipment with a total estimated value of £250 and 17 items of information technology equipment, and some accessory pieces, with a total value of approximately

£15,000 have been reported missing over the last 12 months. No items of information technology or other equipment valued at £5,000 or more have been reported missing.

Sleep Disorders

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment he has made of the need for a Scottish centre for the diagnosis and management of sleep disorders; what funding he has provided since 1992 for such a service; and if he will make a statement; [17996]

(2) what plans he has to ensure continued provision for a national diagnosis and management centre for sleep disorders; and if he will make a statement; [17997]

(3) if he will make a statement on the implications of the closure of the sleep laboratory at the royal infirmary of Edinburgh; [18002]

(4) what is the current availability of continuous positive airways pressure units and accessories in the NHS in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.[18004]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am glad to confirm that the royal infirmary of Edinburgh NHS trust will not be closing its sleep laboratory. I am pleased that the laboratory has secured sufficient funding of £530,000 to enable it to continue in operation after 1 April 1997.

The assessment of need for sleep disorder services is a matter for health boards to determine. A Scottish needs assessment programme report on obstructive sleep apnoea and allied disorders is to be published shortly. In the light of the report, health boards, other purchasers and interested providers will wish to assess the appropriate level of sleep disorder services required and how best to deliver care locally and nationally, for patients across the length and breadth of Scotland.

The current availability of continuous positive airways pressure units and accessories in the NHS in Scotland is a matter for health boards and providers and information is not held centrally. Sleep disorder services at the royal infirmary's sleep laboratory were purchased on a national basis until 31 March 1996 when the purchasing of services was devolved to health boards. Funding from 1991–92 to 1995–96 is set out in the list.

1991–92: £50,000
1992–93: £55,000
1993–94: £296,000
1994–95: £287,000
1995–96: £519,000

ENVIRONMENT

Social Housing

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how much the Government spent on *(a)* new social housing and *(b)* maintenance of social housing in (i) England, (ii) the west midlands and (iii) London between 1990 and 1996; [16551]

(2) how much the Government spent on *(a)* new social housing and *(b)* maintenance of social housing between 1990 and 1996; and what were the equivalent figures for other OECD countries. [16550]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* The available information on allocations for expenditure on social housing stock made by the government for the years 1990–91 to 1996–97 is set out in the table. Some of the resources allocated through the single regeneration budget challenge fund and city challenge will be used for investment in social housing but this element is not separately identified in the allocations made. Corresponding figures on a comparable basis for other OECD countries are not available.

£ million

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
England							
Housing corporation net approved development programme	1,154	1,639	2,306	1,795	1,487	1,149	1,030
Housing annual capital guidelines	1,396	1,345	1,290	1,378	1,038	994	943
Estate action	180	268	348	357	373	316	257
Cash incentive scheme[1]	—	—	31	—	30	60	60
Estates renewal challenge fund	—	—	—	—	—	—	30
Other local authority[2]	121	187	80	45	39	30	30
Management and maintenance allowances for local authority stock	2,955	3,070	3,206	3,266	3,298	3,324	3,364
Housing action trusts	—	10	27	78	92	93	88
London							
Housing corporation approved development programme	n/a	612	701	690	553	443	416
Housing annual capital guidelines	473	451	454	474	355	321	299
Estate action	33	58	86	85	98	88	87
Cash incentive scheme[1]	—	—	21	—	16	33	34
Estates renewal challenge fund	—	—	—	—	—	—	12
Other local authority[2]	86	100	8	3	12	10	10
Management and maintenance allowances for local authority stock	772	820	857	912	940	958	960
Housing action trusts	—	—	12	34	43	47	38
West Midlands							
Housing corporation approved development programme	n/a	112	154	162	134	100	88
Housing annual capital guidelines	122	120	120	130	101	102	100
Estate action	25	35	41	47	49	41	25
Cash incentive scheme[1]	—	—	1	—	1	2	4
Estates renewal challenge fund	—	—	—	—	—	—	8

£ million

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Other local authority[1]	3	5	7	5	4	3	3
Management and maintenance allowances for local authority stock	207	214	225	229	231	240	249
Housing action trusts	—	—	—	2	6	11	14

[1] Resources were provided for cash incentives schemes in 1990–91 and 1991–92 but within a package of measures directed at homelessness which are included in the 'other local authority' row.
[2] Covers special programmes for homelessness, rural housing, energy efficiency, New Town defective dwellings, flats over shops and the Housing Partnership Fund.

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17067]

Sir Paul Beresford: During the 12 months from 1 February 1996 to 31 January 1997, 217 items of equipment and furniture have been stolen from this Department and its agencies with a total value of £200,013; this includes 174 items of IT equipment with a total value of £183,314, with one item being valued at £5,000 or more—a portable computer valued at £5,126. There is also one item of IT equipment valued at £300 that is unaccounted for.

Landfill Directive

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the proposed European directive on landfill; and what meetings he has had with industrial and other non-governmental bodies to discuss the proposed directive. [17518]

Mr. Clappison: The European Commission has not yet published its draft proposals for a landfill directive. When it does so, we shall consult widely about what is being proposed with industrial and other non-governmental bodies.

Landfill Sites (Methane)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the proportion of methane produced at landfill sites that can be captured for energy conversion over the entire period that methane will be produced. [17519]

Mr. Clappison: The quantity of methane gas which can be collected from a landfill site over its lifetime depends on a wide range of site specific details. However, for the purpose of investigations into landfill gas emissions, a gas extraction efficiency of 70 per cent. over the lifetime of the waste has been assumed. This is based on available published information resulting from field studies.

It is further estimated that, in 1994, 28 per cent. of extracted methane was burnt in landfill gas energy recovery schemes the remainder being flared.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the proportion of organic compostable waste currently disposed of via landfill, incineration, anaerobic digestion and composting, and other disposal routes by the water industry and the agriculture, food processing, commercial and other industrial sectors; and how he predicts these disposal routes will change, following the introduction of the landfill tax. [17521]

Mr. Clappison: This information is not available. The Environment Agency's national waste survey and research is expected to improve data quality. We expect that one of the effects of the landfill tax will be to reduce the proportion of waste going to landfill.

Landfill Sites

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for curbing greenhouse gas emissions from landfill sites. [17512]

Mr. Clappison: The waste strategy for England and Wales includes targets both for the reduction of waste going to landfill and measures to increase the proportion of organic (degradable) content in municipal solid waste (MSW) which is diverted from landfill to other forms of treatment.

Additionally guidance to regulators drafting and enforcing waste management licences for landfill sites—set out in waste management paper 4—advises that the most satisfactory control option is the installation of whole-site landfill gas collection at new sites receiving biodegradable wastes and also for existing sites if the site has significant remaining capacity and if significant gas production is likely.

As a result of these measures it is anticipated that landfill gas emissions will fall from the 1990 estimate of 1.89 mte to 1.54 mte in 2000.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersens, *(c)* BMI, *(d)* Capita and *(e)* Sema since 1992 and the broad function to be carried out by the contractor and the value of the contract in each case. [17606]

Sir Paul Beresford: The following contracts were held in 1995–96 by Electronic Data Systems:

Scope of work	Value £ thousand
Quality assurance on HMIP assessment of Nirex	358

The following contracts were let to Capita during 1996–97:

Scope of work	Value £ thousand
Evaluation of estate action	431
Recruitment services	312
Evaluation of housing action trusts	249
Monitoring funding on special needs housing	186
Use of private sector finance in local authority housing	85
Housing investment programme: review of present process	49
Developing framework on codes of practice for standards in homes in multiple occupation	31
Legal and financial advice on rundown of Bristol development corporation	27
2 x training seminars	0.6
2 x services	0.9

Further information on years preceding 1999–97 is obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

Sellafield

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the report by British Nuclear Fuels' Director of Health, Safety and the Environment on the reprocessing and high level waste storage at Sellafield presented to a conference at Drogheda on 11 and 12 January. [17263]

Mr. Gummer: None.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total sum allowed for local authority credit approvals for housing investment in 1996–97; what were the figures in current prices for each of the preceding three years; and if he will make a statement on his Department's current assessment of future needs. [17290]

Mr. Curry: The sum allowed for local authority credit approvals for housing in 1996—97 in England is £789 million. The figures for the preceding three years at current prices are:

1995–96: £869 million

1994–95: £893 million

1993–94: £1,014 million

The Department takes its figures for the need for repairs to local authority housing from the English house condition survey. The 1996 survey will give us an up-to-date picture of the need for investment in the local authority stock. We expect to publish results later this year.

Correspondence

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the office of the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), *(a)* received the letter dated 24 January concerning stage II of the Avon ring road from the hon. Member for Kingswood and *(b)* forwarded this letter to the Minister of State for Transport. [18116]

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Member's letter dated 24 January was received in my private office on 30 January 1997. It was then passed to Department of the Environment officials in the Government office for the south-west on 4 February and was forwarded to regional transport officials on the following day to consider whether the issues raised were more appropriate to the Department of Transport. Once this became apparent, officials notified the Department of Transport centrally, on 21 February. I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay. I have asked my hon. Friend the Minister of State to reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 3 March 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Water Cannon

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times water cannons have been used by police forces in Britain since 1967; for what reasons they were used; on what dates they were used; in what places they were used; and if police forces are currently authorised to use water cannons. [17949]

Mr. Maclean: Water cannons have never been used by police forces in England, Wales or Scotland. It is for chief police officers to decide what public order equipment to deploy and how to authorise its deployment.

Sexual Orientation (Police Database)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances an individual's sexual orientation is recorded on the police national computer. [18222]

Mr. Maclean: An individual's sexual orientation should not be recorded on the police national computer.

Charities (Criminal Records Checks)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from *(a)* Barnardos and *(b)* the Scouts Association about the proposed charges for criminal records checks on charities; and if he will make a statement. [17968]

Mr. Maclean: We have received many representations on this matter from a range of voluntary groups, including Barnardos and the Scouts Association. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced to the House on Second Reading of the Police Bill [*Lords*] that we shall seek

> "to amend the Bill ... to introduce an order making power to enable free checks to be provided for specific groups, such as volunteers, if and when the money became available to cover the costs of doing so."—*Official Report*, 12 February 1997; Vol. 290, column 359.

Convicted Paedophiles

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he is taking to track convicted child sex abusers who, on release from prison on licence, have immediately disappeared; [18355]

(2) what steps he is taking to track convicted child sex abusers who change their names. [18343]

Mr. Maclean: The Sex Offenders Bill places an obligation on those convicted or cautioned for paedophile and other serious sex offences to notify changes of name and address to the police. Failure to do so, in the circumstances laid down by the Bill, will be a criminal offence.

The police have devoted substantial efforts to managing the risks posed by paedophiles, in co-operation with other agencies, and have developed strategies to monitor the movements of paedophiles who try to escape from view. If a prisoner released on licence fails to keep contact with his probation officer in accordance with the terms of his licence, he may, depending on the circumstances, be recalled to prison.

Youth Justice System

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what proposals he has to publish a Green Paper on the youth justice system; and if he will make a statement. [13199]

Mr. Maclean *[pursuant to his answer, 30 January 1997, columns 313–14]:* The Government will be publishing a Green Paper tomorrow, setting out proposals for preventing children offending.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Companies

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in which years since 1979 Government assistance was given to capital or revenue expenditure of (i) publicly owned and (ii) private water companies for *(a)* new reservoirs and *(b)* prevention of leaks in mains supplies; and in each case what was the nature of the assistance. [17740]

Mr. Clappison: In 1983–84 the Government made a specific grant, repayable within five years, to Northumbrian Water towards the financing costs of major investment including the Kielder reservoir. No other financial assistance from Government since 1979 has been specifically for the provision of new reservoirs or the prevention of leaks in mains supplies, which have been matters for the former water authorities and the water companies.

Sellafield

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what report he has received from the Environment Agency in respect of Nirex's assessment of the likely destruction of geological information from the construction of a rock characterisation facility at Sellafield. [17729]

Mr. Gummer: None.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans he has for public consultation on *(a)* the groundwater pressure data and *(b)* Nirex's revised interpretation of the base line hydrogeology before he makes a decision on the proposed rock characterisation facility at Sellafield; [17734]

(2) what plans he has for consulting interested parties regarding the impact on base line hydrogeology of the proposed rock characterisation facility, at Sellafield. [17735]

Mr. Gummer: I am considering the matter.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information Nirex has provided to him in respect of independent peer review of the base line groundwater pressure dataset relating to the proposed rock characterisation facility at Sellafield; [17736]

(2) what assessment he has made of the relevance of the hydrogeological base line dataset to the safety case of a nuclear repository at Sellafield. [17733]

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 23 January, *Official Report*, column *678*.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee has given to his Department regarding consultation with interested parties over the base line hydrogeological effects of the proposed rock characterisation facility at Sellafield. [17737]

Mr. Gummer: None. However, in the response that the committee published in February 1993 to UK Nirex Limited's "Consultative Document on a Rock Characterisation Facility", RWMAC said that it would be important to ensure that the base hydrogeological regime in the region of the potential repository site and the extent of monitoring was agreed by independent peer review or other means with as many interested parties as possible and that a period of 18 months to two years of monitoring prior to the commencement of shaft sinking would be regarded as normal practice.

In September 1995, the committee published a report, "Review of aspects of the scientific mission and role of the Nirex Rock Characterisation Facility at Sellafield", made in response to requests by UK Nirex Limited and Cumbria county council. In this, the committee said that its recommendations over timing remained, but were now likely to be met

> "in view of the interpolation of the RCF planning inquiry into the overall repository programme."

The committee said that the proposed peer review should be published prior to the start of RCF shaft excavation.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements were made for peer review by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution of the Nirex proposal to begin construction work at the proposed nuclear waste repository site during the public inquiry into the proposed RCF at Sellafield. [17981]

Mr. Gummer: I am not aware of any such proposal.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what cost recovery arrangements have existed between HMIP and Nirex since the public inquiry into the proposed rock characterisation facility at Sellafield. [17980]

Mr. Gummer: None. HMIP's previous agreement with UK Nirex Limited ended in September 1994, following notice of termination given by the company. The Environment Agency is currently consulting publicly on the terms of a new agreement that it is minded to enter into with Nirex.

Caesium-137

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has conducted into the re-suspension of Caesium-137 into the environment via biological pathways following nuclear accidents *(a)* within and *(b)* outside the United Kingdom. [18108]

Mr. Gummer: A study of re-suspension of radioactive caesium at a number of sites within the United Kingdom and western Europe was undertaken for my Department following the Chernobyl accident. The report of this work, entitled "Environmental Radioactivity from Chernobyl", has been placed in the Library of the House.

Biodiversity

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes have been made to his Department's commitments to action in 1997 in respect of biodiversity plans set out in section 6 of "This Common Inheritance" 1997, in his most recent departmental Minis report. [17725]

Mr. Gummer: My Department is totally committed to achieving the UK biodiversity plan's actions for 1997 and beyond as set out in section 6 of the commitments table of "This Common Inheritance" 1997. The latest departmental Minis report will fully reflect this commitment.

Homes (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of *(a)* council and *(b)* housing association homes that will be required for the Greater London area in each of the years to 2000. [17982]

Mr. Clappison: There are no official projections of council homes or housing association homes required for the Greater London area in future years.

Social Housing (Lancashire)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the number of new social homes required in each borough in Lancashire in each of the years to 2000. [18436]

Mr. Clappison: There are no official projections of social homes required in each borough in Lancashire for future years.

Countryside Commission

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the name of the national heritage adviser to the Countryside Commission; and what is his professional background. [18010]

Mr. Clappison: The National Heritage adviser to the Countryside Commission is Mr. Paul Walshe. His professional background is that of a landscape architect and an architect. He also has a postgraduate degree in environmental conservation.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which consultants were employed by the

Countryside Commission to advise it on the crossing of the River Avon by the proposed Salisbury bypass; what were the terms of reference given to the consultants; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the consultants' report. [18012]

Mr. Clappison: The consultants were Novell Tullett of Bristol, assisted by Christopher Taylor, who is a landscape historian and former head of the archaeological survey for the Royal Commission on historic monuments of England.

The terms of reference given to the consultants were as follows:

"The appointed consultants will be required to undertake the following tasks:

an assessment of the character and importance of the landscape setting of Salisbury Cathedral in the Nadder and Avon Valleys, through which the proposed road runs;

an assessment of the impact of the proposals on this landscape, in particular in the vicinity of the East Harnham Meadows;

advise whether or not the measures proposed for landscaping will significantly ameliorate the impact of the proposal on the area and, if not, what, if any, further measures could be adopted."

The consultants were also asked to advise on the impact of any alternative alignments put forward by the Highways Agency avoiding the East Harnham meadows site of special scientific interest.

I have made arrangements for a copy of the consultants' report to the commission to be placed in the Library.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on aid and trade provision. [18277]

Dr. Liam Fox: Given the success of British companies in winning business with ATP support, the ATP budget in Asia is under severe pressure. This is why companies were advised of a hold on new offers of ATP support in Asia last November.

I have now finalised the future allocation of aid resources following the Budget. The allocations for ATP in the next two years have been increased by 45 per cent. and 37 per cent. respectively, to £77.7 million in 1997–98 and £70.7 million in 1998–99. The 1999–2000 allocation is £49 million.

In Asia, these enhanced levels will allow ODA to meet contractual commitments; to support those projects on which offers of assistance have been made; and to proceed, subject to satisfactory appraisal, with identified projects for which appraisals are nearly complete or are close to approval. Further ahead, we shall fulfil our obligations under the concessionary finance arrangements signed with overseas Governments as aid programme resources allow. In practice, with the exception of the small number of projects mentioned above where appraisal is well advanced, no further offers of ATP in Asia are likely to be made for some time. However, ATP remains a significant element in the ODA aid effort, and the position will be reviewed again during this year's public expenditure round.

In Africa where demands are fewer, business can continue as usual within the resources allocated.

Companies seeking further information on ATP in either Asia or Africa should consult the ODA or Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which five companies were allocated the largest sums from the United Kingdom aid and trade budget between 1978 and 1994; how much cash was allocated during this period; and what percentage of the budget for this period their allocation represented. [18019]

Dr. Fox: I refer the hon. member to the reply given by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right honourable Friend the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *357*.

Ivory Coast

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made to the Government of the Ivory Coast regarding measures taken against the Student Federation, Fédération Estudiantine et Scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire. [17849]

Dr. Liam Fox: The British embassy in Abidjan recently met senior Ivorian Government officials to discuss the legal status of FESCI and the measures taken against that organisation.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had in respect of the human rights situation in the Ivory Coast. [17850]

Dr. Fox: My ministerial colleagues and I receive occasional representations from groups concerned with human rights in Cote d'Ivoire. The British embassy in Abidjan closely monitors human rights and recently met senior Ivorian Government officials to discuss the issue. Foreign Office officials have also met visiting Ivorian parliamentary opposition leaders.

WALES

Bron Dyffryn Special School

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much direct funding Bron Dyffryn special school has been in receipt of from Her Majesty's Government during each of the last three years. [18288]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None that I am aware of. Bron Dyffryn is a local education authority maintained special school funded by Denbighshire county council in accordance with the resource allocation formula contained in its local management of schools scheme.

Targets for the Planning Inspectorate Agency

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what performance targets he has set for the Planning Inspectorate Agency's work in Wales for the financial year 1997–98. [18600]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The key objectives for the agency in 1997–98 continue to be to preserve the impartiality and quality of the inspectorate's work while seeing further to improve its efficiency. I have set the following key targets for the agency's work in Wales:

Timeliness

(a) Eighty per cent. of all planning appeals decided by written representations to be determined within 17 weeks;

(b) Eighty per cent. of all planning appeals decided by hearings to be determined within 22 weeks;

(c) Eighty per cent. of all planning appeals decided by inquiries to be determined within 30 weeks;

(d) To provide an inspector for local plan inquiries on request within 26 weeks of the end of the objection period and to deliver 90 per cent. of inspector's reports to local authorities by the dates agreed in service agreements.

Financial

(a) Unit costs of planning appeals decided by written representations not to exceed the target to be set for the Inspectorate by the Department of the Environment;

(b) Recover 90 per cent. of receipts due within eight weeks of the invoice date.

Efficiency

Contribute to the generation of an efficiency improvement in the Agency's use of running costs compared with 1996–97, in accordance with the target to be set for the inspectorate by the Department of the Environment.

Quality

To satisfy the advisory panel on standards and thus the Secretary of State, annually and following rigorous monitoring, that the quality of the Inspectorate's work is being maintained at a high standard with 99 per cent. of its case work, free from error.

Welsh Language

To respond in Welsh to all inquiries, written or oral, received in Welsh within the same time scales as allowed for responding to inquiries generally.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Jobcentres (Jobs Advertised)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the average number of hours per week advertised for jobs in each jobcentre in England in the latest week for which figures are available; [17715]

(2) what was the average number of jobs advertised in each jobcentre in England in each week from November 1996 to the latest week available; [17724]

(3) what percentage of jobs advertised in each jobcentre in England were for part-time work; and what percentage of jobs advertised in each job centre in England were for jobs specifying 40 hours or more in the latest week for which figures are available; [17716]

(4) what percentage of jobs advertised in each jobcentre in England were for permanent employment at the latest date for which figures are available; [17717]

(5) what was the average pay rate on offer at each jobcentre in England in the latest week for which figures are available; [17722]

(6) what was the lowest pay rate on offer at each jobcentre in England in the latest week for which figures are available. [17723]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Peter Pike, dated 3 March 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the details of vacancies held at Employment Service Jobcentres in England. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The Employment Service (ES) does not collect figures relating to the average weekly hours of vacancies held at Jobcentres, nor details relating to vacancies specifying forty hours or more per week.

I have arranged for a copy of a table to be placed in the Library, which shows the number of vacancies remaining unfilled at Jobcentres in England for the months of November 1996, December 1996 and January 1997. Vacancy statistics are collected on a monthly basis, rather than weekly, and published by the Office for National Statistics through the National Online Manpower Information System (NOMIS). A Nomis access point is located within the House of Commons Library.

A simple split of vacancies between those which are part-time or full-time is held on Nomis, but the latest available figures relate to January 1996. I regret that later figures are not currently available as a result of problems arising from the introduction of new computer systems but I expect that the Office for National Statistics will be able to resume quarterly publication later this year when the problems have been overcome.

Although the Employment Service does not collect regular figures on wage rates of vacancies held at Jobcentres, some national estimates are available from research. The latest available information relates to 1994 and was in the reply to your previous question which appeared in Official Report Column 907 dated 1 February 1996.

I hope this is helpful.

Higher Education

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received regarding numbers of students in higher education. [17727]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend regularly receives representations from a range of bodies and institutions on a number of higher education issues, including student numbers. Nearly one in three young people in Britain now enters full-time higher education, compared with one in eight in 1979. Our spending plans assume that this record participation rate will continue. Longer-term plans for student numbers will be decided in the light of recommendations from the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if, in the case of people refused incapacity benefit, her Department takes into account the information contained in the incapacity benefit application form regarding illness and incapacity, when applying the availability for work criteria to a claim for jobseeker's allowance. [17880]

Mr. Forth: A decision on incapacity benefit that a person is capable of work also applies to jobseeker's allowance. While a person may be capable of work, we recognise that some people's mental or physical condition may restrict the type of work for which they are available. That is why under JSA a person with a mental or physical condition may restrict their availability for work in any way, provided that those restrictions are reasonable in the light of their condition.

In determining what is reasonable the Employment Service may, in cases of doubt, require more information about a condition which restricts availability. The IB disallowance notice sets out the level at which a person has been assessed and the functional areas in which limitations were identified; the ES may request this information from the jobseeker and this is normally sufficient. In the few cases where additional information is required an independent adjudication officer may approach the Benefits Agency Medical Service for further information about the condition. ES staff do not, however, have access to IB application forms when assessing a person's availability for work.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if fluctuating disability is taken into account under the jobseeker's allowance scheme when considering a person's availability for work. [17882]

Mr. Forth: Under the provisions of the jobseeker's allowance a person with a mental or physical condition may restrict their availability for work in any way, provided that those restrictions are reasonably in the light of their condition. In determining what is reasonable the employment adviser will consider all the relevant aspects of a person's condition, including whether it is a fluctuating disability.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersens, *(c)* BMI, *(d)* Capita and *(e)* Sema since 1992 and the broad function to be carried out by the contractor and the value of the contract in each case. [17603]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service has entered into the following contracts since 1 April 1993.[1]

Contractor	*Number of contracts*	*Value* £	*Function*
Capita	Three	47,674	Management consultancy (management information systems)
		7,109	Management consultancy (corporate objectives)
		4,567	Accounting system consultancy
Sema	Three	41,259	System analysis
		6,412	IT consultancy (network address study)
		11,750	IT network consultancy (network feasibility study)

No other contracts have been awarded by any of my departments or agencies to any of the named contractors during that period. This does not include orders placed with the GCat catalogue operated by EDS.

[1] Detailed information prior to 1 April 1993 is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Public Authority Contracts (VAT)

Mr. Allason: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the extent to which public authorities, with special reference to schools and hospitals, have disproportionately favoured non-VAT registered traders when issuing contracts. [18154]

Mr. Page: The information requested is not available as no assessments have been carried out of the extent to which public authorities contract with VAT registered and non-VAT registered traders.

The Audit Commission tells me that local education authorities—schools—can recover VAT on their non-business activities under section 33 of the Value Added Taxes Act 1994, so have little incentive to favour non-VAT registered traders.

For the NHS—hospitals—as for similar bodies such as banks which cannot recover their input VAT, there is an incentive to favour non-VAT registered businesses. The Audit Commission has no knowledge of this happening on a wide scale and the registration limit of £47,000 for VAT means that non-VAT registered traders may be involved only in very small scale contracts.

Anti-dumping Duties

Mr. Couchman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the amount raised from anti-dumping duties imposed by the EU on photocopiers in 1995. [17749]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* Anti-dumping duty on photocopiers amounting to £906,522 was collected by HM Customs and Excise in the UK in 1995. Information on the amount collected across the EU is being collated and will be placed in the Library of the House when available.

Mr. Couchman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many anti-dumping duties have been imposed by the European Union *(a)* from 1980 to 1985, *(b)* from 1985 to 1990 and *(c)* since 1990. [17750]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* Definitive EU anti-dumping duties were applied to the following number of products in the periods in question:

1980 to 1984: 40

1985 to 1985: 49

1990 to date : 99.

Mr. Couchman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the anti-dumping duties imposed for the periods (i) 1984 to 1990 and (ii) 1990 to 1996 in *(a)* the European Union, *(b)* the USA, *(c)* Australia and *(d)* Mexico. [17751]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* The table lists the definitive anti-dumping duties imposed in the European Union by year from 1984; 55 such duties were imposed between 1984 and 1989, and 98 between 1990 and 1996. Details of each duty were published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*, for which references are given. This is available in the Library of the House. The annex does not list anti-dumping cases which were terminated or for which undertakings were obtained.

Information on anti-dumping duties imposed by the US is available on the world wide web, reference http://www.ita.doc.gov\import_admin\records. Complete details could be reproduced in the form requested only at disproportionate cost. Information on anti-dumping duties imposed by Australia and Mexico is being collated and will be placed in the Library of the House when available.

Definitive anti-dumping duties imposed in the European Union 1984 to date

Product	*Exporting country*	*Definition duty imposed (Official journey reference)*
Hardboard	USSR	1984 (OJ 1984 L170/68)
Exterior panel doors	Taiwan	1984 (OJ 1984 L170/70)
Ball bearings (miniature)	Japan, Singapore	1984 (OJ 1984 L193/1)
Acrylic fibres	USA	1984 (OJ 1984 L205/1)
Sodium carbonate (dense)	USA	1984 (OJ 1984 L311/26)
Concrete reinforcing bars	Spain	1984 (OJ 1984 L33/15)
Pentaerythritol	Canada	1985 (OJ 1985 L13/1)
Paraformaldehyde glass mirrors	Spain, South Africa	1985 (OJ 1985 L148/1)
Electronic typewriters	Japan	1985 (OJ 1985 L163/1)
Ball bearings (<30mm)	Japan	1985 (OJ 1985 L167/3)
Hydraulic excavators	Japan	1985 (OJ 1985 L176/1)
Polystyrene sheets	Spain	1985 (OJ 1985 L198/1)
Glycine	Japan	1985 (OJ 1985 L218/1)
Oxalic Acid	Brazil	1985 (OJ 1985 L26/6)
Basic chromium sulphate	Yugoslavia	1985 (OJ 1985 L321/81)
Copper sulphate	Poland	1985 (OJ 1985 L41/11)

Definitive anti-dumping duties imposed in the European Union 1984 to date

Product	*Exporting country*	*Definition duty imposed (Official journey reference)*
Copper sulphate	Yugoslavia	1986 (OJ 1986 L113/4,
Clogs	Sweden	1986 (OJ 1986 L32/1)
Potassium permanganate	China, Czechoslovakia, USSR	1986 (OJ 1986 L339/32)
Bicycle chains	China	1986 (OJ 1986 L40/25)
Electronic scales	Japan	1986 (OJ 1986 L97/1)
Copper sulphate	Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, USSR	1987 (OJ 1987 L124/1)
Outboard motors	Japan	1987 (OJ 1987 L124/1)
Vinyl acetate monomer	USA, Canada	1987 OJ 1987 L213/32)
Mechanical wrist watches	USSR	1987 (OJ 213/5)
Vinyl acetate monomer	Canada	1987 (OJ 1987 L275/1)
Urea	Libya, Saudi Arabia	1987 (OJ 1987 L317/1)
Ferro-silicon calcium	Brazil	1987 (OJ 1987 L322/1)
Sheets and plates of iron or steel (hot-rolled 3mm+)	Yugoslavia, Mexico	1987 (OJ 1987 L330/42)
Ball bearings (miniature)	Japan	1987 (OJ 1987 L336/1)
Ferro-silicon	Brazil	1987 (OJ 1987 L343/1)
Mercurys	USSR	1987 (OJ 1987 L346/27)
Ball bearing housing	Japan	1987 (OJ L35/32
Plain paper photocopiers	Japan	1987 (OJ 1987 L54/12)
Deep freezers	USSR	1987 (OJ 1987 L6/1)
Standard multi-phase electric motors	Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, GDR, Hungary, Poland, Romania, USSR, Yugoslavia	1987 (OJ 1987 L83/1)
Bicycle chains	China	1988 (OJ 1988 L115/1)
Potassium permanganate	China	1988 (OJ 1988 L138/1)
Oxalic acid	South Korea, Taiwan	1988 (OJ 1988 L184/1)
Iron or steel coils	Algeria, Mexico, Yugoslavia	1988 (OJ 1988 L188/18)
Iron or steel sections	Yugoslavia, Turkey	1988 (OJ 1988 L313/18)
Serial-impact dot matrix printers	Japan	1988 (OJ 1988 L317/33)
Polyester yarn	Mexico, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey	1988 (OJ 1988 L347/10)
Paracetamol	China	1988 (OJ 1988 L348/1)
Synthetic textile fibres of polyester	Mexico, Romania, Taiwan, Turkey, USA, Yugoslavia	1988 (OJ 1988 L348/49)

Definitive anti-dumping duties imposed in the European Union 1984 to date

Product	*Exporting country*	*Definition duty imposed (Official journey reference)*
Sodium carbonate (light)	Bulgaria, GDR, Poland	1989 (OJ 1989 L131/4)
Video cassettes and video tape reels	Hong Kong, South Korea	1989 (OJ 1989 L174/1)
Sheets of iron or non-alloy steel (cold-rolled)	Yugoslavia	1989 (OJ 1989 L193/11)
Copper sulphate	Bulgaria, USSR	1989 (OJ 1989 L23/1)
Calcium metal	China, USSR	1989 (OJ 1989 L271/1)
Acrylic fibres	Mexico	1989 (OJ 1989 L301/1)
Daisy-wheel printers	Japan	1989 (OJ 1989 L5/23)
Urea	USA, Venezuela	1989 (OJ 1989 L52/1)
Video cassette recorders	South Korea, Japan	1989 (OJ 1989 L57/55)
Paint brushes	China	1989 (OJ 1989 L79/4)
Small screen colour televisions	South Korea, China, Hong Kong	1990 (OJ 1990 L107/56)
Compact disc players	South Korea, Japan	1990 (OJ 1990 L13/21)
Glutamic acid and its salts	Austria, Indonesia, South Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand	1990 (OJ 1990 L167/1)
Ferroboron	Japan	1990 (OJ 1990 L187/1)
Silicon metal	China	1990 (OJ 1990 L198/57)
Tungsten ore and concentrates	China	1990 (OJ 1990 L264/1)
Tungstic oxide and tungstic acid	China	1990 (OJ 1990 L264/4)
Tungsten carbide and fused tungsten carbide	China	1990 (OJ 1990 L264/7)
Ball bearings (miniature)	Thailand	1990 (OJ 1990 L281/1)
Silk typewriter ribbon fabrics	China	1990 (OJ 1990 L306/21)
Polyolefin woven bags	China	1990 (OJ 1990 L318/2)
Video cassettes	Hong Kong	1990 (OJ 1990 L343/1)
Ferro-Silicon	Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Venezuela, Yugoslavia	1990 (OJ 1990 L38/1)
Potassium permanganate	Czechoslovakia	1990 (OJ 1990 L42/1)
Tubes of alloy or non-alloy steel	Romania, Yugoslavia	1990 (OJ 1990 L91/8)
DRAMS	Japan	1991 (OJ 1990 L193/1)
Ferro-silicon	Brazil	1991 (OJ 1991 L111/1)
Audio cassettes	Japan, South Korea	1991 (OJ 1991 L116/35)
Aspartame	Japan, USA	1991 (OJ 1991 L134/1
Linear tungsten halogen lamps	Japan	1991 (OJ 1991 L14/1)

Definitive anti-dumping duties imposed in the European Union 1984 to date

Product	*Exporting country*	*Definition duty imposed (Official journey reference)*
Espadrilles	China	1991 (OJ 1991 L166/1)
Artificial corundum	China, Ukraine, Russia	1991 (OJ 1991 L235/1)
Small screen colour televisions	South Korea	1991 (OJ 1991 L275/24)
Video tapes in cassettes	China	1991 (OJ 1991 L293/2)
Pocket lighters, gas-fuelled	China, South Korea, Thailand, Japan	1991 (OJ 1991 L326/1)
Oxalic acid	India, China	1991 (OJ 1991 L326/6)
Dihydrostreptomycin	China	1991 (OJ 1991 L362/1)
Barium chloride	China	1991 (OJ 1991 L60/1)
EPROMS (semi-conductors)	Japan	1991 (OJ 1991 L65/1)
Urea	Venezuela	1991 (OJ 1991 L81/1)
Welded tubes of iron or non-alloy steel	Turkey, Venezuela	1991 (OJ 1991 L91/1)
Video cassettes	Hong Kong	1992 (OJ 1992 L139/1)
Semi-finished products of alloy steel	Turkey, Brazil	1992 (OJ 1992 L182/23)
Video cassettes	Hong Kong	1992 (OJ 1992 L182/6)
Sheet and plates of iron or steel	Mexico, Yugoslavia	1992 (OJ 1992 L221/36)
Silicon metal	Brazil	1992 (OJ 1992 L222/1)
Car radios	South Korea	1992 (OJ 1992 L222/8)
Ball bearings (> 30mm)	Japan	1992 (OJ 1992 L286/2)
Monosodium glutamate	Indonesia	1992 (OJ 1992 L299/40)
Synthetic fibres of polyesters	Taiwan, Turkey, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia	1992 (OJ 1992 L306/1)
Potassium chloride	USSR	1992 (OJ 1992 L308/41)
Large aluminium electrolytic capacitors	Japan	1992 (OJ 1992 L353/1)
Ferro-silicon	Egypt, Poland	1992 (OJ 1992 L369/1)
Thermal paper	Japan	1992 (OJ 1992 L81/1)
Cotton yarn (non-retail)	Brazil, Turkey	1992 (OJ 1992 L82/1)
Electronic scales	Japan	1993 (OJ 1993 L104/4)
Seamless pipes and tubes of iron or non-alloy steel	Hungary, Poland, Croatia	1993 (OJ 1993 L120/34)
Magnesium oxide	China	1993 (OJ 1993 L145/1)
Bicycles	China	1993 (OJ 1993 L228/1)
Low carbon ferro-chrome	Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine	1993 (OJ 1993 L246/1)
Monosodium glutamate	Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan, Korea	1993 (OJ 1993 L255/1)

Definitive anti-dumping duties imposed in the European Union 1984 to date

Product	*Exporting country*	*Definition duty imposed (Official journey reference)*
3.5" microdisks	Japan, Taiwan, China	1993 (OJ 1993 L262/14)
Electronic weighing scales	Singapore, South Korea	1993 (OJ 1993 L263/1)
Cotton yarn	Turkey, Brazil	1993 (OJ 1993 L289/1)
Ferro-silicon	USSR, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Venezuela, Yugoslavi, Brazil	1993 (OJ 1993 L302/1)
Deadburned magnesia	China	1993 (OJ 1993 L306/16)
Photo albums	China	1993 (OJ 1993 L333/67)
DRAMs	South Korea	1993 (OJ 1993 L66/1)
Synthetic fibres of polyesters	India, South Korea	1993 (OJ 1993 L9/2)
Outer rings of tapered roller bearings	Japan	1993 (OJ 1993 L9/7)
Pig iron	Turkey, USSR, Brazil, Poland	1994 (OJ 1993 L182/37)
Ferro silicon	China and South Africa	1994 (OJ 1994 L77)
Potassium permanganate	China	1994 (OJ 1994 L298)
Television camera systems	Japan	1994 (OJ 1994 L111/106)
Large aluminium electrolytic capacitors	Korea, Taiwan	1994 (OJ 1994 L152/1)
Cotton yarn	Turkey	1994 (OJ 1994 L191)
Calcium metal	China, Russia	1994 (OJ 1994 L207/27)
3.5" magnetic disks	Hong Kong, Korea	1994 (OJ 1994 L236/2)
Artificial corundum	China	1994 (OJ 1994 L270)
Calcium metal	China and Russia	1994 (OJ 1994 L270)
Ethanolamine	USA	1994 (OJ 1994 L28/40)
Furazolidone	China	1994 (OJ 1994 L285/1)
Fluorspar	China	1994 (OJ 1994 L62/1)
Ferro-silicon	China, South Africa	1994 (OJ 1994 L77/48)
Potassium choloride	USSR	1994 (OJ 1994 L80/1)
Isobutanol	Russia	1994 (OJ 1994 L87/3)
Silicon carbide	China, Poland, Russian Federation, Ukraine	1994 (OJ 1994 L94/21)
Ferro-silicon	Venezuela, Brazil, Russia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine	1995 (OJ 1995 L 118)
Furfuraldehyde	China	1995 (OJ 1995 L 15)
Ammonium nitrate	Russia	1995 (OJ 1995 L198)

Definitive anti-dumping duties imposed in the European Union 1984 to date

Product	*Exporting country*	*Definition duty imposed (Official journey reference)*
Plain paper photocopiers	Japan	1995 (OJ 1995 L 244)
Urea	Russia	1995 (OJ 1995 L 49)
Disposable lighters	China	1995 (OJ 1995 L101)
Sodium carbonate	USA	1995 (OJ 1995 L244)
Ferro-silico-manganese	Brazil, South Africa, Russia and Ukraine	1995 (OJ 1995 L248)
Electronic weighing scales	South Korea and Sinapore	1995 (OJ 1995 L307)
Persulphates	China	1995 (OJ 1995 L308)
Colour televisions	South Korea, China, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand	1995 (OJ 1995 L73)
Pig iron	Czech Republic	1996 (OJ 1996 L12)
Unwrought magnesium	Russia and Ukraine	1996 (OJ 1996 L174)
Activated powdered carbon	China	1996 (OJ 1996 L192)
Refractory chamottes	China	1996 (OJ 1996 L21)
Synthetic fibres of polyester	Turkey	1996 (OJ 1996 L272)
Polyester textured filament yarn	Indonesia and Thailand	1996 (OJ 1996 L289)
Grain oriented electrical sheets	Russia	1996 (OJ 1996 L42)
Polyester staple fibres	Belarus	1996 (OJ 1996 L54)
Butt welding tubes	China, Croatia and Thailand	1996 (OJ 1996 L84)
Bicycles	Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand	1996 (OJ 1996 L91)
Floppy disks	Malaysia, Mexico and the USA	1996 (OJ 1996 L92)
Ring binder mechanisms	Malaysia and China	1997 (OJ 1997 L22)

Nuclear Power Stations (Decommissioning)

Mr. Cox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimated year for decommissioning for each of the nuclear power stations in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [17963]

Mr. Page: Decommissioning of a nuclear power station is a matter for the operator, taking into account the requirements of the regulatory authorities. This includes details of timing.

Army Sales

Mr. Cox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total value of British arms sales to overseas countries during 1996; and if he will make a statement. [17966]

Mr. Nelson: Information on UK trade in defence equipment is not yet available for 1996. Information for pervious years is published in "UK Defence Statistics" which is available in the Library of the House.

Research Grants

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the total amount of Government research grants allocated in each of the past five years to each university in (i) pharmacology, (ii) bio-physics, (iii) food hygiene and (iv) information technology. [17287]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 26 February 1997]:* Information on Government spending is not held centrally, but the available information on grant funding awarded to universities by the research councils is given in tables, which I have placed in the Library of the House.

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the minimum age requirements enforced by his Department. [15921]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Department sets out the following age requirements in primary legislation:

Under the Explosives Act 1875, sections 31 and 39, it is an offence to sell gunpowder and other explosives, including fireworks to any person apparently under the age of 16.

Under the Consumer Credit Act 1974, section 50, it is an offence to send, with a view to financial gain, any document inviting a minor—a person under the age of 18—to borrow money, obtain goods on credit or hire, obtain services on credit or apply for information or advice on borrowing money for otherwise obtaining credit for hiring goods.

Under the Employment Rights Act 1996, section 211, for the purposes of a redundancy payment, no period of employment counts until the employee has attained the age of 18.

Privatisation Brochure

Mr. Grocott: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report,* column *329,* how many inquiries have been received on the Government's telephone information services on *(a)* its regulatory policy and *(b)* its privatisation programme advertised in the document "Privatisation: Setting Enterprise Free." [17480]

Mr. Lang: The telephone numbers given in the publication "Privatisation: Setting Enterprise Free" are those of senior Treasury officials with a range of responsibilities which include providing information about the UK's regulatory policy and the UK's experience and expertise in the process of privatisation, particularly in response to inquiries from overseas. These contact points have been advertised for several years. No record has been kept of the number of specific inquiries each of the officials has received over the period.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report,* column *329,* if he will indicate the categories of *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations to whom copies of his privatisation document were sent. [17479]

Mr. Lang: Copies of the booklet, "Privatisation: Setting Enterprise Free", were sent to Members of Parliament, to delegates to the privatisation conference of 5 December, to the commercial sections of London diplomatic posts which were not represented at the conference, and to the commercial sections of UK diplomatic posts overseas.

Copies have also been sent to others upon request.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report,* column *329,* what is the cost of operating the inquiry services on *(a)* UK regulatory policy and *(b)* the Government's privatisation policy advertised in "Privatisation: Setting Enterprise Free"; and how many staff are employed, at what cost in salaries, in each case. [17481]

Mr. Lang: Explaining regulatory policy forms a small part of the Treasury's work on utility regulation. Up to five people at various levels are involved in this work as necessary—the team also covers energy, competition and deregulation interests. The explanatory work incurs salary costs of no more than £10,000 per annum.

As set out in the Government's second competitiveness White Paper, the Treasury promotes the export of UK expertise in privatisation through a dedicated unit. It devotes some 2.25 person years to this work at a salary cost of some £65,000 per annum.

Science, Engineering and Technology

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the work of the women in science, engineering and technology unit; and if he will make a statement on the future of the unit. [18357]

Mr. Taylor: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I have considered the report on the first two year's work of the development unit on women in science, engineering and technology, and it is clear that considerable progress has been made on the recommendations in the "Rising Tide" report. Nevertheless, further work is required and we have decided that the unit should continue for a further period. A detailed announcement will be made in due course.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the growth in short-term appointments within the publicly funded science, engineering and technology base; and what actions he is taking to reduce the number of such appointments. [18358]

Mr. Ian Taylor: In principle, fixed-term contracts bring benefits to research and to researchers in terms of increased flexibility and opportunities. In recent years, there has been particularly strong growth in universities in research and in the number of research posts, most on a fixed-term basis. Tensions can arise where contract staff are, for whatever reasons, not as well managed as they might be.

We acknowledged the concerns in the 1993 White Paper "Realising Our Potential: A Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology" and set out policies for addressing them. To implement these we have increased funding for the prestigious and longer-term university research fellowships, administered by the Royal Society. The research councils have also restructured and strengthened their fellowship provision.

A significant achievement has been an agreement, or concordat, brokered by the Office of Science and Technology, between the research councils, the Royal Society and bodies representing the universities and colleges, which aims to improve the career management of contract research staff. This was launched in September last year, and has been widely welcomed. The research councils are committed to applying its principles to research staff in council institutes and units. The OST is discussing with other Government Departments the possible extension of principles in the concordat to the management of research staff in other public sector research establishments.

Cecchini Report

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the extent to which the United Kingdom has realised the proposals set down in the Cecchini report. [18119]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* The Cecchini report of the 1988 considered the considerable potential benefits which might flow from the European single market. The European Commission completed last autumn a major review of the impact and effectiveness of the single market, which presented an assessment of its operation and the benefits which have accrued from it. The review concluded[1] that employment opportunities, income per head, productivity, and competitiveness have all increased because there has been a single market, but that there was more which could still be done to complete it and to improve its working. The Commission is now preparing an action plan and timetable to take this forward. The Government have supported the objectives of the single market, welcomed the review, and support further steps to maximise its benefits.

[1] The results of the review are summarised in Commission communication COM(96) 520 of 30 October 1996.

Genetically Engineered Animals

Mr. Morley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the United Kingdom patents which have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* applied for since 1 July 1995 in respect of (i) genetically engineered animals and (ii) the processes for creating such animals. [17828]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* There have been a total of three patent applications filed under the Patents Act 1977 and published since 1 July 1995 relating to genetically engineered animals and processes for preparing them. GB 2295395 relates to an animal model for Alzheimer's disease, GB 2291646 relates to transgenic fish and GB 2288807 relates to transgenic animals expressing an insecticidal protein. One application—GB 2265909—which was made before 1 July 1995, and which relates to a process for producing transgenic animals, has since been granted.

Research Councils (Employment)

Dr. Strang: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many scientists were employed by *(a)* the Agriculture and Food Research Council and *(b)* the Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council in each year from 1979 to the present. [17655]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* Science budget money freed up by institute restructuring will have been recycled for research purposes, either in institutes or universities where there has been significant growth in the number of researchers.

The figures—staff in post—are shown in the table.

Number of scientists employed in AFRC/BBSRC institutes—1979 to 1996

Year	Number of scientists
AFRC	
1979	3,417
1980	3,360
1981	3,298
1982	3,371
1983	3,316
1984	3,326
1985	3,002
1986	2,997
1987	2,797
1988	2,726
1989	2,649
1990	2,588
1991	2,158
1992	2,190
1993	2,151
BBSRC	
1994	2,043
1995	1,979
1996	2,003

Institute of Food Research

Dr. Strang: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many scientists were employed at the Institute of Food Research in each year from 1986 to the latest available date. [17657]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* Science budget money freed up by institute restructuring will have been recycled for research purposes, either in institutes or universities where there has been significant growth in the number of researchers.

The figures—staff in post—are shown in the table.

Number of scientists employed at IFR—1986 to 1996

Year	Number of scientists
1985–86	534
1986–87	514
1987–88	517
1988–89	463
1989–90	425
1990–91	308
1991–92	338
1992–93	335
1993–94	303
1994–95	313
1995–96	316

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Disarmament

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress being made at the conference on disarmament to start negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. [18220]

Mr. David Davis: A work programme for the 1997 session of the conference on disarmament is under discussion in Geneva. We are pressing for negotiations to begin on a fissile material cut-off treaty as a priority.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *321*, if he will make a statement on progress in preparing draft legislation in respect of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. [18256]

Mr. Davis: Preparatory work on legislation needed for the United Kingdom to ratify the comprehensive test ban treaty continues. We hope to include it in the next parliamentary session.

Hong Kong

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the level of the Hong Kong gold and foreign currency reserves on the date of signing the China-UK agreement on the future of Hong Kong. [18082]

Mr. Hanley: The Sino-British joint declaration was signed on 19 December 1984. At the end of December 1984, the value of gold reserves held by the Hong Kong Government was HK$439 million or approximately £49 million at the then exchange rate of £1=HK$9.0344. The value of foreign currency reserves, excluding gold reserves, was HK$50,151 million or £15,550 million.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level of gold and foreign currency reserves held by the Hong Kong authorities. [18110]

Mr. Hanley: At the end of January 1997, the value of gold reserves held by the Hong Kong Government was HK$182 million or approximately £15 million at the then exchange rate of £1=HK$12.4216. The value of foreign currency reserves, excluding the gold reserves, was HK$510,200 million or £41,070 million.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date he arrived and departed from Hong Kong during his recent visit; what official meetings he had; and with whom. [18353]

Mr. Rifkind: I arrived in Hong Kong on Saturday 15 February and departed on Monday 17 February. I held meetings with the Governor of Hong Kong and senior Hong Kong Government officials including the Chief Secretary Mrs. Anson Chan; with the chief executive designate of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Mr. C. H. Tung; with members of staff at the British Trade Commission and of the office of the British senior representative, Sino-British joint liaison group; and with members of the Executive and Legislative Councils.

European Union Offices (Costs)

Mr. Lamont: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representative offices, where some staff have diplomatic immunity, the EU has around the world; what are their running costs; how many staff they employ; and what proposals he has to bring about reductions in the cost of the offices and the number of staff. [18092]

Mr. David Davis: The European Commission has 128 representative offices overseas, employing about 2,400 personnel of which some 600 are Brussels-based Commission officials. The granting of diplomatic privileges and immunities for the staff of the representative office is a matter of local custom. For 1996, the budget for the representative offices was £152 million, inclusive of salaries and running costs.

We take every opportunity to press for the terms of service of Commission officials to take full account of the tight budgetary constraints which affect all EU member Governments.

Mr. Lamont: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the EU will be spending *(a)* in the current year and *(b)* in each of the next five years, on publicity and information offices; and what plans he has to bring about reductions in these amounts. [18093]

Mr. Davis: There is an overall budget of 110,800,000 ecu for all EU information and communication activities in 1997. The budget is set annually and so spending for the next five years has not yet been fixed. The Council agreed to cuts in this budget for 1997, but spending was restored by the European Parliament.

Iran

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards the encouragement of trade with Iran. [17883]

Mr. Hanley: There are restrictions on the sale of military, dual-use and other such goods to Iran as announced by the then Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), on 1 March 1993, *Official Report*, column *8*. Otherwise, we engage in normal trade.

Burma (Trade)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the European Commission's proposal to withdraw preferences for Burma under the generalised system of preferences. [18231]

Mr. David Davis: Our priority on Burma is to promote economic and political reform. We are considering the Commission's proposal on GSP against this background. The Council of Ministers has not yet been asked to take a decision.

DEFENCE

Findlay Court Martial

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what response the Government are making to the European Court of Human Rights judgment on the Findlay court-martial case; and if he will make a statement. [18699]

Mr. Soames: The Government fully support the court-martial system as the appropriate and necessary framework within which to deal with military discipline.

We have recently made a number of changes to reform aspects of the court-martial system as part of the Armed Forces Act 1996. As I said when announcing our preliminary proposals in the Armed Forces Bill to the House on 7 December 1995—*Official Report*, columns *346–47*—the changes represent a valuable and coherent package of reforms and improvements to take the court-martial system into the next century. The new arrangements will enable it to continue to meet the armed forces' requirement to administer justice firmly but fairly.

Although the court found the United Kingdom to be in violation of article 6(1) of the European convention on human rights, the court has recognised our action in reforming the court-martial system, and in its judgment describes the changes we have made, noting with satisfaction that we have done so. The court made clear that its judgment applies to the system that existed before the reforms we have made. These are due to be introduced on 1 April 1997.

RAF Accident Investigation

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made to the procedures and regulations governing Royal Air Force accident investigation and the role of senior officers in relation to board of inquiry findings since June 1994. [17989]

Mr. Soames: The following changes have taken place since June 1994:

(a) The minimum rank of the president of a board of inquiry into an aircraft accident has been raised from Flight Lieutenant to Squadron Leader.

(b) The role of the relevant Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief in the investigation has been titled "Reviewing Authority" (it was previously untitled).

(c) Assessment of the degree of negligence has been transferred from the president of the board of inquiry to the convening and reviewing authorities.

(d) An intermediate degree of negligence has been introduced, such that negligence is now described as "minor", "major" or "gross".

(e) Differences in the rules on representation at boards of inquiry for service men and service women were removed.

(f) Persons affected were given the right to make a further statement if the degree of negligence attributed by one authority was increased by another.

West Indian Guardship

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to public funds of the West Indian guardship for the year 1996. [17961]

Mr. Soames: The cost of the West Indies guardship for the year 1996 was £7.22 million. Her associated Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker was provided at a cost of £2.38 million.

Civilian Affairs Units

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilian affairs units are established in the field Army; how many personnel are assigned to these units; and what are his plans to expand or establish additional units for this role. [17986]

Mr. Soames: A civil affairs group is currently being established. This will comprise of four Regular and 50 Territorial Army specialists. There are currently no plans to establish additional units.

Scimitars (Parachute Dropping)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects approval to be given for parachute dropping of Scimitar CVR(T) vehicles from RAF Hercules aircraft; and if he will list the locations where parachute dropping of Scimitars will be permitted. [17988]

Mr. Soames: There has been no capability for the parachute dropping of Scimitar CVR(T)s since the mid-70s. However, approval for the dropping of Scimitars from RAF Hercules aircraft has been granted for the purposes of trials of a re-engineered parachute delivery system for heavy equipment. The trial drop zone locations are all within the Larkhill/Salisbury plain military training area. The trials are due to conclude later this year. Subject to a satisfactory outcome, the equipment will be dropped on routine airborne exercises at locations judged technically and operationally suitable.

Visual Air-to-air Training

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current weather minima for visual air-to-air training by Royal Air Force Tornado F3 aircraft at less than 5,000 feet above ground level, in terms of *(a)* discernibility of the horizon, *(b)* in-flight visibility, *(c)* cloud ceiling and *(d)* vertical and horizontal separation from cloud; and if he will list changes made to these criteria in the last five years. [17992]

Mr. Soames: The current weather minima for visual air-to-air training by Royal Air Force Tornado F3 aircraft at less than 5,000 ft above ground level are that *(a)* there are clear visual meteorological conditions enabling pilots to orientate themselves; *(b)* there is a minimum in-flight visibility of 5,000 overland and 8,000 over sea; *(c)* any cloud base is no lower than 1,500 ft; and *(d)* the pilot is able to maintain 1,500 m horizontal and 1,000 ft vertical separation from cloud. There have been no changes to these criteria in the past five years.

NATO (Extension)

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the *(a)* political and *(b)* strategic advantages of the extension of NATO to include the states of Eastern Europe. [17977]

Mr. Soames: The study on NATO enlargement, published by the Alliance in September 1995, concluded that political and strategic benefits would result from extending membership of NATO to European states. We continue to support that conclusion.

Media Units

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many media units are established in the field Army; how many personnel are assigned to these units; and what are his plans to expand or establish additional units for this role. [17985]

Mr. Soames: Although there are no units established for this specific purpose, 87 military and civilian staff are currently providing support to media operations within the Army. This number may increase to reflect the current level of operational commitments.

Aircraft (Visual Practice Interceptions)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the minimum vertical and horizontal separation distances between intercepting aircraft and their targets when conducting visual practice interceptions of *(a)* other fast jet aircraft, *(b)* military transport aircraft, *(c)* civil transport aircraft and *(d)* helicopters. [17991]

Mr. Soames: The information is as follows:

Type	*MSD*[1] *(feet)*	*Remarks*
Fast jet target	1,000	MSD becomes 500 feet if closing for simulated gun attack astern of target.
Military transport aircraft	1,000	—
Civil transport target	See remark	Standard civil air traffic minimum separation requirements of 1,000 feet vertically and 3 nautical miles (nm) horizontally apply
Helicopter target	1,000	—

[1] Minimum separation distance.

School Armouries and Firing Ranges

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent by the Ministry of Defence since 1984 on school armouries and firing ranges on school grounds; and if he will list the cost and name of each school involved. [17884]

Mr. Soames: I regret that the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Meetings (Hong Kong)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what official meetings he held during his recent visit to Hong Kong; and when he *(a)* arrived and *(b)* departed. [18352]

Mr. Portillo: During my visit to Hong Kong I met the Governor, the Commander British Forces and a wide range of personnel from the garrison. I arrived at 08.50 on 26 February, and departed at 19.30 the same day.

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the minimum age requirements enforced by his Department. [15923]

Mr. Soames: For service personnel, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 30 January, *Official Report*, columns *348–49*. The minimum age of recruitment for civilians is the school leaving age of 16.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his Department's latest assessment of the capability of Russia to destroy safely its stockpile of chemical weapons; [18280]

(2) what is his Department's latest assessment of the capability of the United States of America to destroy safely its stockpile of chemical weapons. [18279]

Mr. Soames: The Russian Federation signed the chemical weapons convention in the full knowledge of the destruction timetable it would be obliged to meet under the terms of the convention. However, Russia has yet to ratify the convention and, until it does so, it is not bound by these provisions. Although Russian fulfilment of these obligations is feasible, some technical difficulties are still to be overcome. The Russians also claim that they would not be able to do so due to financial and environmental problems, and continue to press for outside financial assistance. The UK believes it is for the Russian Government to resolve these difficulties. Early ratification of the CWC and full implementation of its provisions, may, however, help to secure financial assistance from the outside.

Although the United States has not yet ratified the chemical weapons convention, it is obliged by national legislation to destroy its stockpile of chemical weapons by 2004. This date is earlier than will be required if the US ratifies the CWC before entry into force. We have no reason to believe that the United States does not have the capability or political will to meet this goal.

BATES

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the original estimated cost of the battlefield artillery target engagement system when the project was originally undertaken; and what was the total outturn cost of the BATES 1 facility; [18224]

(2) what was the original estimated cost of the BATES 2 project; what has been the total expenditure on it to date; and what is the latest total estimated outcome cost of the BATES 2 facility. [18225]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The release of cost figures for BATES phase 1 would prejudice continuing negotiations with the contractor and I am therefore withholding them under exemption 7 of the "practice on access to Government information". BATES phase 2 is expected to cost about

£80 million, slightly less than the original estimated cost. Less than £1 million remains to be spent.

TREASURY

EU Member States (National Accounts)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the accounting treatments being adopted by each EU member state in their 1996 and 1997 national accounts which differ from United Kingdom practice; and what assessment he has made of the expected effect of each difference. [15333]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. David Shaw, dated 3 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent question on the accounting treatments being adopted by each EU member state in their 1996 and 1997 national accounts which differ from United Kingdom practice; and what assessment he has made of the expected effect of each difference.

There is a requirement for certain statistics relating to European Monetary Union convergence to be compiled and reported to Eurostat in line with the European System of Accounts, second edition (ESA79). For the purposes of excess deficit criteria, the European System of Accounts (ESA95) Regulation 2223/96 requires that 1 September 1999 reports will be the last to be submitted on an ESA79 basis.

ESA79 is used as the basis for accounting treatment for the debt and deficit criteria for EMU. There are some differences in treatment between member states. In these cases, in order to ensure better comparability for the debt and deficit procedure, after consultation with statistical experts from member states, The Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) takes decisions on methodological rules to be applied by member states. Eurostat visits member states to check compliance with these rules. However, no specific assessment has been, or could realistically be, made of the effects of differences in treatment in other countries' own accounts from UK practice. UK accounting treatment is described in *United Kingdom National Accounts—The Blue Book*, published annually by the Office for National Statistics.

Council Directive 89/130/EEC, Euratom, of 13 February 1989 (known as "the GNP Directive") requires that member states provide data on Gross National Product at market prices (GNPmp) on an ESA79-basis for own resource purposes annually to the Commission. The Directive also requires member states to provide the Commission (Eurostat) with an inventory of the procedures and basic statistics used to calculate GNPmp and its components. The GNP Committee has the job of examining compliance of GNPmp data with ESA79 definitions, and examining the statistical sources and the procedures used for calculating GNPmp and its components.

Data for 1996 have not yet been compiled by member states. What treatment has been adopted—and any differences between countries—will not become clear until these accounts are published, or submitted to Eurostat. Therefore any comparison of differences in treatment between the UK and other member states could not yet be done for latest years.

For the national accounts in general, in advance of the introduction of ESA95, there is no statutory framework which determines treatment to be adopted by each member state in their national accounts as a whole. As I mention above, Eurostat does however maintain copies of inventories describing the procedures and basic statistics in that part of the accounts used to calculate data on Gross National Product at market prices (GNPmp) and its components, required under the GNP Directive for own resource purposes.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency set up by his Department since the start of April 1992. [16976]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The costs involved in the setting up of the executive agencies of the Chancellor's Departments have been included in the published running costs for the years in which the agencies were established.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy that the United Kingdom may enter European currency union without an accompanying fiscal union among participating member states. [17044]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes. If the United Kingdom were to join EMU we could face sanctions if we were consistently to run up budget deficits of more than three per cent. of GDP and do nothing to correct them. Within that constraint, our budgetary choices would rightly remain a matter for national Governments and Parliaments.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the progress being made by each of the countries of the European Union in meeting the convergence criteria for EMU in 1996. [18123]

Mr. Clarke *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* Most countries made progress towards meeting the convergence criteria for EMU in 1996. On the information available at present, my judgment is that it is very unlikely, though not impossible, that performance against the criteria will be sufficiently clear and sustainable for EMU to proceed on 1 January 1999.

Excess Winter Mortality Rates

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what have been the excess winter mortality rates for each of the last 10 years expressed in terms of excess *(a)* numbers and *(b)* percentages for (i) people over the age of 65 years, (ii) single parent families, (iii) people in receipt of income support, (iv) people with disabilities and (v) others; [17431]

(2) what have been the excess winter mortality rates in England for the past 10 years expressed *(a)* in excess numbers and *(b)* as percentages. [17423]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 3 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to your recent question asking what have been the excess winter mortality rates in England for the last 10 years expressed in (a) in excess numbers and (b) as percentages.

The figures you requested are shown in the following table:

Excess winter deaths, England, all persons, all ages

Period	*Excess winter deaths*	*Excess winter deaths index*
1986–87	24,654	14.8
1987–88	31,493	18.7
1988–89	20,326	12.1
1989–90	44,370	26.5
1990–91	35,718	21.6
1991–92	33,015	20.1
1992–93	24,194	14.6
1993–94	25,029	14.7
1994–95	25,757	15.6
1995–96[1]	37,990	23.1

[1] Provisional.

Excess Winter Deaths are defined as the number of deaths in the four months from December to March, minus the average of the numbers in the preceding autumn (August–November) and the following summer (April–July).

The Excess Winter Deaths Index is the number of excess winter deaths expressed as a percentage of the average of the number of deaths in the autumn and the summer periods.

You also asked for the excess winter mortality rates for each of the last 10 years expressed in terms of excess (a) the numbers and (b) percentages for (i) people over the age of 65 years, (ii) single parent families, (iii) people in receipt of income support, (iv) people with disabilities and (v) others.

Information on parental status, income, or physical impairment is not collected at death registration and we are therefore unable to provide data in terms of these characteristics.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the weekly number of excess deaths for December 1996 and January 1997; and what were the figures for the same periods in each of the last five years. [17382]

Mrs. Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 3 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent question asking for the weekly number of excess deaths for December 1996 and January 1997, and the figures for the same periods in each of the last five years.

The data on deaths by week of occurrence for England are shown in the tables below:

Week beginning	*Deaths*
December 1991 to January 1992	
25 November 1991	10,475
2 December 1991	10,289
9 December 1991	11,477
16 December 1991	12,126
23 December 1991	12,287
30 December 1991	13,106
6 January 1992	12,696
13 January 1992	11,970
20 January 1992	11,567
27 January 1992	12,002
December 1992 to January 1993	
30 November 1992	10,397
7 December 1992	10,395
14 December 1992	10,664
21 December 1992	11,313
28 December 1992	12,082
4 January 1993	12,673
11 January 1993	11,716
18 January 1993	10,978
25 January 1993	10,781
December 1993 to January 1994	
29 November 1993	13,197
6 December 1993	12,603
13 December 1993	12,302
20 December 1993	12,085
27 December 1993	12,554
3 Janaury 1994	12,447
10 January 1994	11,816
17 January 1994	11,493
24 January 1994	11,045
31 January 1994	10,988
December to Janaury 1995	
28 November 1994	9,785
5 December 1994	10,528
12 December 1994	10,690
19 December 1994	11,523
26 December 1994	12,292
2 January 1995	12,193
9 January 1995	11,682
16 January 1995	11,543
23 January 1995	11,609
30 January 1995	11,055
December 1995–January 1996[1]	
27 November 1995	11,452
4 December 1995	11,676
11 December 1995	12,535
18 December 1995	13,569
25 December 1995	14,191
1 January 1996	14,528
8 January 1996	13,079
15 January 1996	11,525
22 January 1996	11,467
29 January 1996	11,294
December 1996–January 1997[1]	
25 November 1996	10,013
2 December 1996	10,276
9 December 1996	10,769
16 December 1996	12,116
23 December 1996	13,544
30 December 1996	16,002
6 January 1997	16,044
13 January 1997	14,242
20 January 1997	12,482
27 January 1997	11,341

[1] Provisional data.

Annual weekly average

	Number
1991	10,269
1992	10,051
1993	10,406
1994	9,954
1995	10,242
1996	[1]10,164

[1] Provisional.

I hope this reply has been helpful.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the performance of the Inland Revenue

since 31 March 1996 in meeting its targets for *(a)* personal callers, *(b)* telephone calls, *(c)* repayment claims and *(d)* correspondence. [17891]

Mr. Jack: The Inland Revenue does not publish its performance against annual targets until results covering the full period are available and appropriate validation and checking of figures has been carried out.

On latest provisional information, the Department is broadly on course to meet or exceed its annual targets for personal callers, telephone calls and repayment claims, but it is unlikely to achieve its correspondence target.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the annual cost to public funds of mortgage interest tax relief at *(a)* 20 per cent. and *(b)* 23 per cent. [17857]

Mr. Jack: The estimated total cost of mortgage interest tax relief in 1997–98 is £2.4 billion. The rate of relief is 15 per cent. If the rate of relief were 20 per cent. the extra cost to the Exchequer would be about £800 million. If the rate of relief was 23 per cent. the extra cost would be about £1.3 billion.

These estimates are based on the assumption, by convention, of no change from the current estimated average building society interest rate of 6.51 per cent.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the annual cost to public funds of increasing the amount of a mortgage allowable for tax from £30,000 to £60,000, assuming no other changes to the tax system. [17858]

Mr. Jack: The estimated total cost of mortgage interest tax relief in 1997–98 is £2.4 billion. Relief is limited to the interest on loans of £30,000. If the limit was increased to £60,000, and the rate of relief remained at 15 per cent. the extra cost to the Exchequer would be about £900 million.

The estimate is based on the assumption, by convention, of no change from the current estimated average building society interest rate of 6.51 per cent.

Inflation and Unemployment

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *577*, what assessment he has made of the contribution of *(a)* indirect taxes and *(b)* imported raw material prices to recent reductions in inflation and unemployment. [17907]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Indirect taxes and imported raw material prices are just two of the many factors that affect inflation and unemployment. In particular, the appropriate use of monetary policy and labour market reforms have played an important role in achieving recent reductions in inflation and unemployment. It is difficult to quantify the precise effects of each of these factors.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will translate the PSBR figures in table 4A.8 of the Red Book into cash terms. [18127]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* The table shows the figures requested.

Historical series for the PSBR

	£ million
1965–66	0.9
1966–67	1.1
1967–68	2.0
1968–69	0.4
1969–70	–0.6
1970–71	0.8
1971–72	1.0
1972–73	2.4
1973–74	4.3
1974–75	8.0
1975–76	10.3
1976–77	8.3
1977–78	5.4
1978–79	9.2
1979–80	9.9
1980–81	12.5
1981–82	8.6
1982–83	8.9
1983–84	9.7
1984–85	10.1
1985–86	5.6
1986–87	3.6
1987–88	–3.5
1988–89	–14.7
1989–90	–8.0
1990–91	–0.6
1991–92	13.8
1992–93	36.3
1993–94	45.4
1994–95	35.9
1995–96	31.7
1996–97	26.4
1997–98	19.2
1998–99	12
1999–00	3
2000–01	–8
2001–02	–18

Adlids

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what contracts the Inland Revenue has with Adlids; what are the costs, nature and duration of these contracts; what procedures were used to enter into the contracts; and what assessment the Inland Revenue has made of the benefits of the contracts with Adlids. [18003]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* The Inland Revenue made a one-off payment of £30,000 for self-assessment information to be printed on 3 million take-away lids.

The "contract" was negotiated via Ardent, one of a number of promotions agencies working on a range of projects to help target self-assessment information to those affected. A 50 per cent. discount was negotiated on normal rates charged by Adlids.

According to research, 60 per cent. of self-employed manual trades people, a key audience for self-assessment information, regularly eat Chinese take-aways. At the cost of 1p per lid, this was a cost-effective and highly targeted way of delivering self-assessment information in an unusual and striking way.

Besides the lids themselves being seen by those likely to be affected by self-assessment, the idea achieved some very positive press coverage.

Unemployment Leavers

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of those leaving the unemployment register went into *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employment in each year since 1979; [16765]

(2) how many of those leaving the register of those unemployed and entitled to claim benefit went into *(a)* full-time employment, *(b)* part-time employment, *(c)* permanent employment and *(d)* temporary employment in (i) England, (ii) Wales, (iii) Scotland (iv) Northern Ireland and (v) each standard English region in the last year for which figures are available. [16895]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 3 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your questions (16765 and 16895) on how many of those leaving claimant unemployment went into full-time, part-time, temporary and permanent employment in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and each standard English region in the last year.

The figures in the attached tables show the number of claimants who left the claimant count and went into work in 1995 and 1996 for each standard statistical region in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Information on the destination of claimants from the claimant count is not available prior to January 1995 and no information is available on the type of employment found.

The 'unknown' destinations category shown in the table includes claimants whose claims were terminated because they stopped signing at their Employment Service jobcentre, together with claimants who did not supply a reason for stopping their claim.

Destination of leavers from the claimant count by standard statistical region

Region	*Destination of leavers (thousands)*			
	Found work	*Other known destinations*	*Unknown destinations*	*All leavers*
1996				
South East	489.4	198.8	361.5	1,047.6
East Anglia	74.5	23.1	25.6	123.3
South West	167.2	58.4	71.8	297.4
West Midlands	166.3	69.6	85.3	321.2
East Midlands	138.5	48.9	56.3	243.7
Yorkshire and Humberside	198.2	77.2	82.9	358.3
North West	233.8	102.3	108.6	444.7
North	143.7	56.0	39.3	239.0
England	1,611.5	632.5	831.3	3,057.3
Wales	108.0	41.5	39.3	188.8
Scotland	216.5	82.5	87.9	387.0
Northern Ireland	54.8	31.0	21.7	107.6
1995				
South East	522.1	217.2	381.3	1,120.5
East Anglia	79.3	24.2	26.8	130.3
South West	175.9	65.3	77.5	318.7
West Midlands	176.6	74.7	86.4	337.6
East Midlands	142.9	53.2	58.3	254.4
Yorkshire and Humberside	200.4	83.6	83.3	367.3
North West	244.7	106.8	110.0	461.4
North	150.7	60.7	39.6	251.0
England	1,692.5	685.7	863.1	3,241.2
Wales	112,3	43.7	39.3	195.3
Scotland	224.9	85.9	88.2	399.0
Northern Ireland	55.4	29.2	21.4	106.0

Source:
JUVOS.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16746]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 20 February 1997]:* This is a matter for the management of the bodies concerned.

Average Weekly Earnings

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest available figures for average weekly earnings in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the United Kingdom for (i) males and (ii) females. [17088]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Sir Wyn Roberts, dated 3 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on average weekly earnings in Wales and the United Kingdom.

In April 1996, average gross weekly earnings of full time employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey period was unaffected by absence were as follows:

	Wales £	*United Kingdom* £
Males	345.50	389.90
Females	250.50	282.30
All	313.10	350.30

This information is taken from the 1996 New Earning Survey conducted separately in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The results of the Great Britain survey are published in six volumes, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library. The results of the Northern Ireland survey can be obtained directly from the Department of Economic Development.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the latest estimates for gross domestic product per capita for 1996 at current market prices and purchasing power parities for *(a)* the United Kingdom and

(b) those of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries for which information is available to him. [17432]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* Provisional estimates of gross domestic product per capita in 1996, measured at purchasing power parity, for the United Kingdom and other OECD countries can be found in the latest edition of the OECD publication, "Main Economic Indicators," which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Income Tax

Mr. Richards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on income tax levels of raising the revenue currently raised through council tax in Wales by an increase in the basic rate of income tax. [17868]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* The latest available year for income tax costings for Wales is for 1994–95. Welsh local authorities were budgeted to collect about £340 million of council tax in 1994–95. In order to raise this same level of revenue, the basic rate of tax would need to be increased by nearly 5p in Wales.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Millennium Exhibition

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his latest estimate of the numbers of visitors which will be accommodated by the millennium exhibition at Greenwich. [16705]

Mr. Freeman: The exhibition's operation company, Millennium Central Limited, has set a target of more than 10 million visitors. The indicative budget produced before Christmas was developed on the basis of this target. It is intended that the site should be accessible to the largest possible number of people from all sections of the community.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sports Grounds

2. **Mr. Booth**: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement about the provision of sports grounds in England. [16696]

Mr. Sproat: The policy document, "Sport: Raising the Game," made clear our commitment to ensure that the best possible sporting facilities are in place to enable sportsmen and sportswomen to reach their full potential, and to develop sport at its grassroots level. The national lottery is already making a significant contribution supporting more than 2,500 projects totalling some £440 million to date.

Museums and Galleries (Funding)

17. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many current capital projects at museums and galleries are supported by Government resources. [16714]

Mr. Sproat: There are currently 27 projects supported by Government resources at the museums and galleries directly funded by my Department. These projects, costing £54 million, are supported by £30 million of Government funding, which is additional to the massive injection of lottery funds into museums and galleries throughout the UK; so far, lottery grants of more than £400 million have been announced.

Lottery Awards (Worcestershire)

18. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many projects in Worcestershire have won awards from national lottery funding bodies; what is the total value of these awards; and if she will make a statement. [16715]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To date, the national lottery distributing bodies have announced 122 awards to projects in Hereford and Worcester for a total of £26.3 million. Eighty-seven of these, worth a total of £18.2 million, fall within the boundaries of Worcestershire as it will be defined from 1 April.

British Waterways

19. **Sir. Anthony Durant:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage is she will make a statement on the support from the millennium fund to British Waterways. [16716]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Millennium Commission has supported one project from the British Waterways Board: the millennium link project to reinstate navigation between the Forth and Clyde and Union canals, which has been offered a grant of £32.2 million. The heritage lottery fund made an award of £25 million to the British Waterways Board for the Kennet and Avon canal.

The commission has supported four other waterways projects: the Ribble link in Lancashire; the Rochdale canel; the Huddersfield narrow canal; and the new lock at Great Conard, Suffolk. In total, canal projects have been offered £61.8 million by the commission.

Tourism (Midlands)

20. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on tourism in the midlands. [16717]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Tourism is an industry of vital importance to the midlands, as it is throughout Britain. In 1995 there were almost 20 million domestic and overseas visitor trips to the areas covered by the Heart of England and East Midlands tourist boards, generating revenue of almost £2,130 million.

The industry in all parts of the country will benefit from the measures contained in the tourism strategy, success through partnership, which I announced on 5 February. The strategy sets out a co-ordinated action plan for Government, the industry and the tourist boards working in partnership to develop tourism to its full potential.

Lottery Awards (Distribution)

21. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will review the distribution of national lottery awards. [16718]

23. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the distribution of national lottery awards. [16720]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The national lottery has been a great success. More than £3 billion has been raised for the good causes and more than 12,000 awards announced for more than 18,000 projects of all sizes in all parts of the United Kingdom. I am continuously considering how the system for the distribution of lottery funds might be improved and will continue to do so.

Historic Churches

22. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the work that English Heritage has undertaken to preserve historic churches. [16719]

Mr. Sproat: Grants from English Heritage towards the preservation of historic churches and other ecclesiastical buildings are available for grade I and grade II* listed properties, and grade II listed properties in conservation areas. Over the five years from 1991 to 1996, English Heritage has provided £47.2 million in such grants, and aims to have spent a further £11.2 million in 1996–97.

Digital Broadcasting

25. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the BBC's proposals for digital broadcasting. [16722]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I welcomed the BBC's overall digital strategy, outlined last May in its publication, "Extending Choice in the Digital Age." I have considered and given approval in principle, under the provisions of the BBC charter and agreement, to the BBC's initial proposals for public service digital television, the details of which are currently subject to public consultation by the BBC.

Television Programmes (Quality)

27. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will undertake a review of the quality of television programmes. [16724]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The monitoring of the quality of television programmes on independent television and the BBC is the responsibility of the Independent Television Commission and the BBC board of governors respectively. The ITC publishes an annual review of the performance of Channel 3 licencees and Channel 4 and the BBC governors report each year on the corporation's performance in the BBC annual report.

British Academy of Sport

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to announce the site of the British academy of sport. [16702]

Mr. Sproat: We announced on 25 February that the preferred site for the British Academy of Sport will be chosen from three contenders: the Central Consortium, the Heyford Consortium and the Sheffield Consortium. These proposals will now be considered in more detail by the United Kingdom Sports Council and my Department.

Millennium Celebrations (Wales)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations she has had with bodies and individuals in Wales with respect to Welsh participation in official millennium celebrations. [16721]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My Department is consulting widely over millennium issues. The millennium co-ordination group, which is chaired by my Department, includes representatives from the Welsh Office. The Church Together in Wales is represented on the Lambeth sub-group which considers the spiritual aspects of the millennium.

In addition, the Millennium Commission has sent its consultation document to all Welsh Members of Parliament, local authorities and local authority associations, the Welsh Office, and Welsh lottery distributors and to arts, sport and heritage bodies. Copies were also sent to the police, churches and voluntary associations in Wales and to companies in the entertainment industry, as well as to any individuals or groups who had inquired about the matter.

New Wembley Stadium

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the proposed new national football and athletics stadium at Wembley. [17100]

Mr. Sproat: I welcome the decision announced by the Sports Council on 17 December 1996 that Wembley is to be the proposed site for the new 80,000 all-seater English national stadium for athletics, football, and rugby league, and will receive a lottery award of £120 million towards the total project costs of around £210 million. This decision is a good example of the Government's commitment to facilitate, through the national lottery, the development of the necessary sporting infrastructure to enable this country to attract to these shore top international events—such as the football World Cup in 2006 and the world athletics championships in either 2001 or 2003.

Tourism Industry (Training)

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of state for National Heritage what action she is taking to promote training in the tourism industry. [16706]

Mr. Sproat: Tourism has enormous potential for job creation: it creates one in five of all new jobs. As stated in our October publication, "People Working in Tourism and Hospitality," to deliver good service—more of the industry must recruit and retain the right people and equip them with the skills that they need. Our comprehensive new strategy for tourism, success through partnership, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched on 5 February, carries this work forward. It is clear from the many letters and comments that we have had already, that the industry particularly welcomes the fact that this is a joint initiative with them, with key targets and specific points for action on many aspects of tourism. As announced in the strategy, next month we shall issue a practical guide specifically for small tourism businesses which will include advice on training and developing staff.

Camelot

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will instruct Camelot to issue twice-weekly figures in cash terms for the amount *(a)* staked, *(b)* paid out in prizes, *(c)* paid out for good causes and *(d)* retained by Camelot. [17834]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 27 March 1997]:* This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. I have—therefore—asked the director general of the national lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to the hon. Member and to place copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

TRANSPORT

British Rail (Winding-up Costs)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when *(a)* the British Rail architecture design group and *(b)* British Rail businesses were wound up; if he will indicate in each case the number of employees (i) in total and (ii) in York one year before the wind-up date; and what sums were spent on (1) redundancy payments and (2) other costs associated with the winding-up of the businesses. [16644]

Mr. Watts: Details of the costs incurred by the British Railways Board on those businesses which were wound up as part of the privatisation process are a matter for the board itself.

London Underground (Tunnel Structures)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 25 February, *Official Report*, column 165, if he will give a breakdown of the figure of £1.2 billion relating to the structures of tunnels. [18075]

Sir George Young: London Underground estimates that £350 million of its investment backlog relates to civil engineering works on the railway's infrastructure, including tunnels. It does not have a more specific figure for tunnels alone. London Underground has recently completed the refurbishment of the Northern line tunnels under the Thames and has re-lined the tunnels around Old Street station. Work on the Bakerloo and East London line tunnels is well under way.

Road Traffic (New Drivers) Act 1995

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what publicity he intends to initiate regarding the Road Traffic (New Drivers) Act 1995 in advance of its implementation. [17995]

Mr. Bowis: We have already publicised the Act and its implementation in the Driving Standards Agency magazine circulated to all approved driving instructors, motorcycle trainers and local road safety officers and have sent a guidance note to justices' clerks and justices' chief executives. Articles will appear in the literature distributed at theory test centres and given to all drivers and riders on passing the practical test. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's information leaflets, including the one sent to all provisional licence applicants, will also include references to the Act, as will the highway code when it is next re-issued. Further publicity events are being planned nearer to the date of implementation which is 1 June 1997.

Bus Drivers (London)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many London bus drivers are currently in receipt of social security benefits; and what is the cost of this to public funds. [18442]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to reduce the number of accidents arising from lorries shedding their wheels. [18268]

Mr. Bowis: Following joint discussions with the Vehicle Inspectorate and the Association of Chief Police Officers, a nationwide survey of the extent of the problem is currently taking place and will continue until the end of April this year. The need for further action will be considered in light of the outcome of this study.

We are also currently updating the Department's leaflet, first issued in 1991, giving further guidance to operators on measures for preventing wheel loss.

Railtrack Land

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions his Department has had with Railtrack about *(a)* the maintenance of fencing, walls and hedges on its land and *(b)* the removal of litter and debris from such land; and if he will make a statement. [18437]

Mr. Watts: Maintenance of boundaries is a matter for Railtrack and enforcement of the relevant statutory duties is the responsibility of the Health and Safety Executive. The Department has consulted Railtrack about proposals to transfer the litter duty which applied to the British Railways Board, to the relevant successor bodies, including Railtrack.

London Underground (Finance)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has made to *(a)* London Transport and *(b)* London Underground Ltd. in the last five years concerning ways in which they could increase revenue for London Underground operation by (i) better marketing and (ii) more commercial use of property; and what estimate he has made of the revenue potential of (i) and (ii). [18346]

Mr. Bowis: Marketing and the management and development of its property are operational matters for London Transport, which recognises its importance.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) of 25 February, *Official Report*, column 157, what factors underlay his statement that operating surpluses on London Underground would grow substantially; and what sums he expects to be available for capital investment in the years 2000 to 2005. [18345]

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. Friend's comments were based on London Underground's own forecasts of substantial growth in operating surpluses. Following privatisation, investment will be funded not only from these surpluses and continued Government support, but also from the recycling of privatisation proceeds and funds raised by the private sector. It is premature to speculate on the precise sums involved, but our overall aim is to modernise the underground's infrastructure within five years of privatisation.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what requests were made by London Transport for capital funding for London Underground Ltd. and what amounts were provided from public funds for *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95 and *(d)* 1995–96. [18351]

Mr. Bowis: London Transport submit to Ministers each year their views on their grant requirements for the forthcoming public expenditure round. The distribution of grant by LT between London Underground Ltd. and its other businesses is an operational matter for LT. The cash allocated to London Underground by LT from 1992–93 to 1995–96 is shown in the table. These figures exclude grant for the construction of the Jubilee line extension.

£ million outturn prices

Year	*Cash paid to London Underground Ltd.*[1]
1992–93	598
1993–94	511
1994–95	413
1995–96	340

[1] Figures supplied by London Transport.

London Underground (Privatisation)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place statutory limits on the re-sale of shares to those currently employed or contracted to London Underground Ltd. in the event of a management buy-out. [18349]

Mr. Bowis: Our proposals for encouraging employees and others to acquire a stake in the privatised London underground will be explained in the White Paper we plan to publish this summer.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral statement of 25 February, *Official Report*, columns 149–65, concerning London Underground Ltd., what *(a)* consultants and *(b)* advisers he intends to employ for what specific purposes and at what estimated costs; and from which vote such payments would be made. [18348]

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. Friend intends shortly to commence the process of inviting bids for the provision of professional advice on the financial implications of privatisation of the London Underground, and of the options outlined in his statement. No estimates have yet been made of the cost of such an appointment; nor have decisions been taken on the vote from which such an appointment would be funded.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms Hoey) of 25 February, *Official Report*, column 161, concerning consultations over the privatisation of London Underground, if he will list those bodies he intends to consult and indicate for each the scope of such consultation. [18344]

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. Friend intends to consult a wide range of bodies, including but not limited to London Transport, the Health and Safety Commission, the Rail Regulator, Office for Passenger Rail Franchising, the London Pride Partnership and the London Regional Passengers' Committee. Consultation will cover matters relevant or of concern to each body. We expect that many other bodies will also wish to let him have their views.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral statement of 25 February, *Official Report*, columns 149–64, on London Underground from what source he estimates that any privatised section of the activities of London Underground will provide funds for paying interest on capital borrowings *(a)* prior to and *(b)* subsequent to the completion of payment of receipts from shares being invested in capital improvements to improve structure or equipment. [18347]

Mr. Bowis: This would depend on the structure for privatisation chosen and on the arrangements made by the private sector operator concerned.

London Underground (Service Levels)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) of 25 February, *Official Report*, column 160, concerning London Underground, if he will make it a duty of the regulator to ensure that existing minimum levels and quality of service are maintained within the fare structure set out in his statement. [18350]

Mr. Bowis: The White Paper we plan to publish this summer will set out our detailed proposals, including the regulatory arrangements which will underpin these requirements.

Jubilee Line Extension

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much of the promised contribution of £300 million towards the cost of the Jubilee line extension has been paid so far by the Canary wharf developers. [18130]

Mr. Bowis: The Canary Wharf developers have agreed to contribute £400 million towards the cost of the Jubilee line extension. To date, London Transport has received £100 million. The balance of £300 million will be paid over a 24-year period starting immediately after the first day of operation of the Jubilee line extension.

Salisbury Bypass

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the terms of reference set by him and by the Secretary of State for the Environment when they sought advice last autumn from the Countryside Commission on the proposed crossing of the River Avon by the Salisbury bypass. [18011]

Mr. Watts: The terms of reference of the review of certain aspects of the proposed A36 Salisbury bypass are set out in paragraphs 51 to 53 of the letter of 22 October 1996 issued on behalf of my right hon. Friends. Specifically, the Secretaries of State instructed the Highways Agency to consult the Countryside Commission on the aspect of the review that was concerned with possible further measures to reduce the overall landscape impact of the bypass in the region of the newly notified East Harnham meadows site of special scientific interest.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Juvenile Courts (Cullompton)

35. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the capacity of Cullompton, Devon, juvenile courts to meet their work load. [16732]

Mr. Streeter: I understand that Her Majesty's magistrates courts service inspectorate is today beginning an inspection of the Devon magistrates courts committee area. We have no reason to doubt the capacity of the Cullompton juvenile court to meet its work load.

Legal Costs (Convicted Criminals)

36. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received on making convicted criminals contribute to the cost of their court hearing and legal aid bills. [16733]

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received on making convicted criminals contribute to the cost of their court hearing and legal aid bills. [16726]

Mr. Streeter: I have received no representations on making convicted criminals contribute to the cost of their court hearing and legal aid bills. However, where their means require it, defendants in criminal cases already make a contribution towards their legal costs.

Legal Aid Budget

38. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the factors underlying the growth in the legal aid budget since 1980. [16735]

Mr. Streeter: The principal factor underlying the growth in legal aid expenditure since 1980 has been the increase in the number of people helped. During the period, the number of acts of assistance increased by 219 per cent., from 1 million in 1980–81 to 3.5 million in 1995–96. Higher unit costs have also contributed significantly to growth, where average payments have consistently grown at a rate well above that of inflation.

National Marriage Week

40. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what results he expects from the institution of National Marriage Week; and what contribution has been made by his Department to its objectives. [16737]

Mr. Streeter: National Marriage Week was organised independently by the Christian charity Marriage Resource. My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor was pleased to accept an invitation from Marriage Resource to speak at an event during National Marriage Week. He called on all those who believe in the institution of marriage to work to promote a positive and realistic vision of marriage. I and my colleagues in the Government are committed to doing all we can to support marriage.

Civil Justice (Access)

41. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to improve access to civil justice; and if he will make a statement. [16738]

Mr. Streeter: The Government have embarked on a wide-ranging set of reforms of the civil justice system, following Lord Woolf's final report "Access to Justice". October 1998 has been set as the target date for the implementation of the major planks of the reforms, which are designed to make civil litigation quicker, cheaper and simpler.

Limitation Legislation

42. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects a full review of limitation legislation to be completed. [16739]

Mr. Streeter: The Law Commission has undertaken a comprehensive review of the law of limitation periods with a view to its simplification and rationalisation. The first stage will be completed when the Law Commission publishes a consultation paper, which it hopes to do this summer. A period of consultation will follow before the Law Commission makes its final recommendations.

Advisory Board on Family Law

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Sectetary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the composition of the Advisory Board on Family Law. [18700]

Mr. Streeter: On 10 December 1966, in response to a question from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), *Official Report* column 96, I set out the Lord Chancellor's plans for the Advisory Board on Family Law which will provide independent advice on the implementation and operation of the Family Law Act 1966.

The Lord Chancellor has now appointed Sir Thomas Boyd-Carpenter to be the chairman of the Advisory Board on Family Law and the following people to be members of the board:

The Honourable Mr. Justice Wall
Naomi Angell
Dr. Carole Kaplan
Dr. Janet Lewis
Suzan Matthews QC
Professor Phyllida Parsloe
Professor Simon Roberts
Jane Simpson
David Skidmore
Colin Webb
Anthony Wells

All appointments are for a period of five years commencing on 1 April 1997 and ending on 31 March 2002. The board's first meeting will take place on 14 April 1997.

Legal Aid Centres

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Parliamentary Sectetary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much grant is allocated in 1996–97 to how many legal aid centres; in which main locations; and if he will make a statement. [17099]

Mr. Streeter: The Department provides the Legal Aid Board with funds from which annual grants are made to nine law centres, in London, Birmingham, Leeds, Cardiff and Middlesex. In 1996–97 the board has paid £900,564 in annual grants to the law centres.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersens, *(c)* BMI, *(d)* Capita and *(e)* Sema since 1992 and the broad function to be carried out by the contractors and the value of the contract in each case. [17605]

Mr. Streeter: The information is as follows:

Consultants	*Number of contracts*	*Nature*	*Value (excluding VAT)*
EDS	1	A seven-year contract was awarded on 8 October 1996 under the private finance initiative. Under the contract, the local county court system (LOCCS) will computerise much of the routine work of the county courts. The first module of the new system, Caseman, will enable court documents to be issued automatically and replace the system of manual record keeping for every case, making access to case details easier. Five existing information technology systems including CREST (which supports Crown court centres) SPC and CCBC (which support centralised functions for Northampton County Court) were transferred to EDS	In region of £20–£25 million
Andersens	0		
BMI	0		
Capita	5	(a) Recruitment services	(a) £32,149
		(b) Recruitment services	(b) £23,262
		(c) Recruitment services	(c) £850
		(d) Recruitment services	(d) £2,550
		(e) Recruitment services	(e) £113
Sema	0		

Court Waiting Times

Mr. Straw: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his reply of 14 February, *Official Report*, column *354*, what was the number of defendants *(a)* on bail and *(b)* in custody, who waited (i) less than eight weeks and (ii) less than 16 weeks before being dealt with. [17622]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Jack Straw, dated 3 March 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the waiting times for defendants on bail and in custody committed for trial to the Crown Court in 1996.

	0–8 weeks	*0–16 weeks*
Bail	16,409	21,120
Custody	29,728	45,019

NORTHERN IRELAND

Cold-related Illnesses

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what have been the excess winter treatment rates for cold-related illnesses in hospitals in Northern Ireland for *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients for each of the last 10 years; [17214]

(2) how many people in Northern Ireland received treatment by NHS doctors for cold-related illnesses for the period December 1996 and January 1997; and what was the average figure for similar periods in the past 10 years. [17221]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in Northern Ireland received hospital treatment as *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients for cold-related illnesses for the period December 1996 and January 1997; and what was the average figure for similar periods in the past 10 years. [17218]

Mr. Moss: The information available for in-patients is shown in the table and covers the period 1989–90 to 1995–96. For the purposes of the question, "cold-related illnesses" have been defined as pneumonia, influenza, bronchitis and hypothermia.

Finished consultant episodes—ordinary admissions and day cases

	Pneumonia	*Influenza*	*Bronchitis*	*Hypothermia*	*Total*
December 1989	591	117	184	5	897
January 1990	324	30	98	6	458
December 1990	346	26	114	12	498
January 1991	322	24	127	8	481
December 1991	294	25	90	9	418
January 1992	292	20	101	2	415
December 1992	210	3	65	8	286
January 1993	226	5	65	4	300
December 1993	301	24	58	13	396

Finished consultant episodes—ordinary admissions and day cases

	Pneumonia	*Influenza*	*Bronchitis*	*Hypothermia*	*Total*
January 1994	330	7	56	11	404
December 1994	252	9	76	11	348
January 1995	291	7	70	5	373
December 1995	345	68	83	18	514
January 1996	371	38	70	6	485

[1] *Source:*
"Hospital Inpatients Systems".

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17063]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested in respect of the Northern Ireland Departments and their agencies is as follows for the period 1 January 1996 to 31 January 1997:

(A) Items stolen		*(B) Items unaccounted for*		*Items valued at over £5,000*	*IT equipment (including in previous figures)*	
Number	*Cost (£)*	*Number*	*Cost (£)*		*Stolen*	*Unaccounted*
83	86,868	138	9,362	One Sokkisha survey instrument—£7,145 (stolen from Roads Service Agency store) One mobile chlorination unit—£6,395 (stolen from Water Service Agency—locked site) One Sokkisha station set—£7,012 (stolen from Roads Service Agency) One Ford Sierra car—£7,805 (stolen from Environment and Heritage Service Agency) One Lorry—£10,443 (stolen from Roads Service Agency locked depot)	Six items totalling £9,242	Six items totalling £2,296

Figures do not include DOE items valued at less than £500 as their inclusion would incur disproportionate costs.

All items valued at over £5,000 were the property of DOE.

Social Deprivation Funds

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when advice or instructions will be issued by the Department of Education (Northern Ireland) to schools in respect of approved uses of the funds allocated under the social deprivation factor. [17672]

Mr. Ancram: Under the local management of schools formula arrangements, it is a matter for the schools to decide and prioritise how they spend their budgets, including their targeting social need allocations. The Department does not specify how any individual elements of school budgets should be spent, but the provision made by any school is always subject to general inspection.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will investigate as a matter of urgency the effect of the social deprivation factor on the balance of funding between controlled and maintained primary schools of approximately the same enrolment, with particular reference to schools with enrolments in excess of 150 pupils. [17667]

Mr. Ancram: The Department's targeting social need policy focuses on the targeting of additional resources to schools in terms of social and educational disadvantage, regardless of whether those schools are controlled or maintained. Just over 60 per cent. of such funding allocated under the local management of schools arrangements goes to Catholic maintained schools, and that is a reflection of the additional need in these schools. However targeting social need allocations represent only a small part of the overall school budget and, when all other factors are taken in account, the total per capita allocations to controlled and maintained schools are very similar.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is *(a)* the total allocation in 1996–97 for the five education and library boards in Northern Ireland in respect of the social deprivation factor in their budgets and *(b)* the amount distributed directly to schools by the Department of Education (Northern Ireland) using a free school meals factor. [17665]

Mr. Ancram: A total of £35,726,893 was allocated to schools by the education and library boards in 1996–97 in respect of targeting social needs.

The Department allocated a total of £1,496,868 to voluntary grammar schools and £563,847 to grant maintained integrated schools in the same year.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what evidence he has obtained of low educational achievement in respect of each grammar school in receipt of funding determined by reference to social deprivation. [17670]

Mr. Ancram: None. Only 4 per cent. of the targeting social need funds is allocated to grammar schools reflecting the low incidence of social deprivation as

measured by the number of pupils entitled to free school meals. All such pupils are eligible for additional support regardless of which schools they attend.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the social deprivation factor was first applied to school budgets in Northern Ireland; what steps have been taken to monitor this allocation and assess its cost-effectiveness; and when he will publish the results of the monitoring procedures. [17666]

Mr. Ancram: Targeting social need funding for schools has been an integral part of local management of schools funding arrangements since their introduction in 1991. Under the LMS formula arrangements it is for schools to prioritise how they spend their budgets, including their targeting social need allocations. Schools are responsible to parents for the way in which they spend their resources and provision made for low achieving pupils is also an integral part of the published inspection reports of schools. A recent research project undertaken by the University of Ulster showed that schools are aware of targeting social need allocations and make every effort to use the funds effectively.

Council For Catholic Maintained Schools

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment his Department makes of the level of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools expenditure per pupil relative to that in the maintained sector. [17669]

Mr. Ancram: None. The level of expenditure incurred by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools is based on an assessment of the resources required to meet its statutory responsibilities.

Traffic Reduction Powers

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to provide the powers granted to local authorities in the Road Traffic Reduction Bill to district councils in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [17700]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service and its chief executive, Mr. W. J. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from G. P. Fraser to Mr. Robert McCartney, dated 28 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked the Chief Executive to reply to your recently tabled PQ about the Road Traffic Reduction Bill. In his absence I will reply on his behalf.

The Road Traffic Reduction Bill, as presently drafted, applies only to local authorities which are highway authorities. The Department of the Environment is the sole road authority in Northern Ireland and, if the Bill is enacted, similar requirements can be placed on the Department, including that of consultation or liaison with district councils, by means of a policy direction.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Sectarian Harassment

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if a Northern Ireland Office Minister was involved in directing the transfer of a member of the Minister of Agriculture's private office who was subsequently found by the Fair Employment Commission to have been the victim of sectarian harassment within that private office. [17800]

Mr. Ancram: The matter is of some complexity and my noble Friend has written to the hon. Gentleman. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Departmental Policies (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the effect of his Department's policies on the residents of Bournemouth since 1992, with special reference to the effects of changes in the resources provided in real terms. [14947]

Mr. Boswell: The residents of Bournemouth alongside those living elsewhere have benefited from MAFF policies which have led to rising farm incomes, greater protection for the interests of farmers and consumers and new measures to safeguard food and public health, while local grant-aided expenditure on flood and coastal defence amounts to more than £1.5 million over the past five years.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency set up by his Department since the start of April 1992. [16964]

Mr. Boswell: Since April 1992, the following executive agencies have been launched by MAFF:

	Date
(a) ADAS[1]	1 April 1992
(b) Central Science Laboratory (CSL)	1 April 1992
(c) Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD)	1 April 1993
(d) Meat Hygiene Service (MHS)	1 April 1995
(e) Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA)	1 October 1995

[1] Preferred bidder for privatisation announced on 19 February 1997.

An analysis of the costs of establishing these agencies is not available without incurring disproportionate cost.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersens, *(c)* BMI, *(d)* Capita and *(e)* Sema since 1992 and the broad function to be carried out by the contractor and the value of the contract in each case. [17604]

Mr. Boswell: Since 1992 the Department has held no contracts with EDS, Andersens or BMI. Prior to September 1993 there were no contracts with Capita. There were orders placed with Sema before that date; details of these orders are not available, but were fairly insignificant compared with later years.

In September 1993 framework agreements were signed with both Capita and Sema. These agreements have no fixed value. There has been one order placed with Capita;

this concerned assistance with the information technology directorate's market testing programme. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, I am unable to reveal the cost of this work. Under the Sema agreement there have been numerous orders having total value of £4,989,000. All concerned project management, systems analysis and programme resources in relation to the development of IT applications software.

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the possible health risk to *(a)* consumers and *(b)* animals of the use of bovine somatotropin in (i) milk and (ii) other products; and if he will make a statement. [17845]

Mrs. Browning: No veterinary medicine is authorised for use unless it meets stringent statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. Safety includes the safety of the consumer of any food produced from the treated animal, and the health and welfare of the treated animal. As part of this process the applicant company is required to submit data to the veterinary medicines directorate, where they are carefully assessed by specialists qualified in various scientific disciplines including biology, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, toxicology and ecotoxicology.

Applications for the authorisation of bovine somatotropin have been very carefully assessed by various independent expert committees in Britain and Europe. They have concluded that BST poses no hazard to public safety or to animal health or welfare.

Nevertheless there is a moratorium on marketing and use of the product in the European Union until 31 December 1999 to allow limited field tests in order to obtain any other scientific data that might be taken into account by the Council of Ministers when taking a final decision to the authorisation of BST. No application for such tests has been made in the UK.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what regulations his Department has issued on the use of bovine somatotropin for (i) milk and (ii) other products; and if he will make a statement. [17846]

Mrs. Browning: None. There is an EU moratorium on the use of BST until the end of 1999. If the Council of Ministers authorises the use of BST when the moratorium expires, no veterinary medicinal product containing BST will be permitted for use in the UK except in accordance with a marketing authorisation issued under the Marketing Authorisations for Veterinary Medicinal Products Regulations 1994. Its use would also be restricted to veterinary prescription.

Genetically Modified Maize

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the recent actions of the Governments of Luxembourg and France in determining his policy in respect of the importation of genetically modified maize. [17847]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 24 February 1997, *Official Report*, column *79*.

Rabies

Mr. Key: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) of 18 February, *Official Report*, column *513*, if the revised protocol relating to rabies antibody tests will provide for mutual acceptance of test results from approved laboratories in participating countries. [18131]

Mrs. Browning: This would be the intention of the revised protocol.

HEALTH

Eye Tests

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people who have had eye tests in each year since 1987. [17683]

Mr. Malone: No information is held on the number of individual patients who receive sight tests. The estimated number of national health service and private sight tests is shown in the table. Because the information on private sight tests is from a sample survey of activity across Great Britain, the figures are for Great Britain only.

Millions

Year	*NHS sight tests*	*Private sight tests*	*Total*
1986–87	12.2	[1]—	—
1987–88	13.5	[1]—	—
1988–89	14.4	[1]—	—
1989–90	6.4	[1]—	—
1990–91	4.8	[1]—	—
1991–92	5.7	[1]—	—
1992–93	6.4	[1]—	—
1993–94	6.6	6.6	13.2
1994–95	7.4	6.5	13.9
1995–96	7.6	7.0	14.6

[1] Information on the number of private sight tests carried out before 1992–93 is not available.

Consultant Vacancies

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there were for consultants by specialty in each year since 1990. [17862]

Mr. Malone: Information on consultant vacancies by specialty for 1990 to 1994 is shown in the table. For information for 1995, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 4 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns *595–96*. Information for 1996 is not yet available.

Data on vacant posts are difficult to interpret and do not necessarily imply a shortage. The census is a snapshot on 30 September each year. Some vacancies will be wholly or partly filled by locums. For others, national health service trusts may find other ways to provide the service than re-advertising. The numbers give no indication of how long the post has been empty. Some of these would have been in the process of being filled.

Vacant consultant posts by specialty in England as at 30 September 1990 to 1994
(whole time equivalent rounded to the nearest ten)

Specialty	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Accident and emergency	20	10	20	20	10
Anaesthetics	90	50	90	80	100
Audiological medicine	—	—	0	—	0
Blood transfusion	0	0	10	0	0
Cardio-thoracic surgery	0	0	0	0	10
Cardiology	10	0	0	10	10
Chemical pathology	10	10	0	0	—
Child and adolescent psychiatry	30	20	30	20	30
Clinical physiology	0	—	0	—	—
Clinical pharmacology and therapeutics	—	—	0	—	—
Clinical cytogenetics	—	—	0	—	—
Clinical immunology and allergy	—	—	0	0	0
Clinical neurological physiology	0	—	0	—	—
Clinical genetics	0	0	0	—	—
Dermatology	10	10	0	0	10
Endocrinology	—	0	0	0	0
Forensic psychiatry	0	0	10	10	10
Gastroenterology	—	0	0	0	0
General pathology	—	—	—	—	—
General surgery	30	20	20	20	20
General medicine	20	10	10	20	10
Genito-urinary medicine	10	10	10	10	0
Geriatric medicine	10	0	10	10	20
Haematology	10	10	10	10	10
Histopathology	20	10	10	0	10
Immuno-pathology	0	0	0	—	0
Infectious diseases	0	—	0	0	—
Medical microbiology	10	0	0	0	0
Medical oncology	—	—	0	0	—
Metal handicap	30	20	10	0	10
Mental illness	130	80	90	80	100
Nephrology	0	0	0	0	0
Neurology	10	0	0	0	0
Neuropathology	—	—	0	0	—
Neurosurgery	0	0	0	0	0
Nuclear medicine	—	—	0	0	—
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	20	20	20	20	20
Occupational health	0	0	0	0	0
Old age psychiatry	20	20	20	10	20
Opthalmology	30	20	10	20	30
Otolaryngology	20	10	10	10	10
Paediatric neurology	—	—	0	—	0
Paediatric surgery	—	0	0	0	0
Paediatrics	30	30	50	40	20
Palliative medicine	0	0	0	—	0
Plastic surgery	10	0	0	0	0
Psychotherapy	0	0	0	0	0
Radiology	30	20	20	20	20
Radiotherapy	10	10	0	0	0
Rehabilitation	0	0	0	0	0
Rheumatology	10	10	0	0	0
Thoracic medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Traumatic and orthopaedic surgery	30	20	30	30	30
Urology	10	20	10	10	10
Virology	—	—	0	—	—
Other	0	10	0	0	0
Total of all specialties	700	470	540	480	570

Source:

The medical and dental workforce census 30 September 1990 to 1994.

Notes:

1. Figures shown are for England as at 30 September of each year.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
3. 0 = 5 or less; — = zero.

Blood (CJD)

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he has issued regarding the acceptability of blood donations from the relatives of persons suffering or who have died from the new variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. [17809]

Mr. Horam: The National Blood Service guidelines exclude from giving blood relatives of people who are suffering from, or who have died from, any form of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what tests are available to demonstrate that blood does not contain the agent of the new variant CJD. [18022]

Mr. Horam: There is no test available to detect Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, including the new variant, in the blood of living persons.

The safety of blood is kept under regular review by the expert advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Blood and Tissues for Transplantation. There is no evidence of any risk of transmission of CJD through blood or blood products. However, as a precautionary measure, the National Blood Service guidelines exclude from giving blood people who, as a result of personal health factors or treatment received, might be at risk of developing CJD, and people with a family history of CJD.

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines indicating *(a)* the organisations that they represent, *(b)* the organisations nominating them to sit on the committee, *(c)* other voluntary and paid employment that they undertake and *(d)* other areas of expertise that they have; and if he will make a statement. [17848]

Mr. Malone: Following is the membership of the Committee on Safety of Medicines, members' qualifications and expertise and their primary place of employment:

Professor M. D. Rawlins BSc MD FRCP(Lon) FRCP(Ed) FFPM: Chairman

Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, Newcastle University;

Professor T. R. E. Barnes MD FRCPsych

Professor of Clinical Psychiatry, London University;

Professor A. M. Breckenridge CBE MD MSc FRCP FRCPE FRSE: Vice Chairman

Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, Liverpool University;

Dr. K. L. Costeloe MB BChir FRCP

Head of Academic Department of Child Health and Reader in Neonatal Medicine, St. Bartholomew's and the Royal London School of Medicine and Dentistry;

Professor J. H. Darbyshire OBE MSc MB ChB FRCP

Head of the MRC's HIV Clinical Trials Centre, University College London Medical School;

Professor H. J. Dargie FRCP FESC

Consultant Cardiologist and Co-Director of CRI in Heart Failure, Glasgow University;

Professor D. S. Davies BSc PhD CChem FRSC

Professor of Biochemical Pharmacology, Royal Postgraduate Medical School, Hammersmith Hospital, London;

Dr. A. M. Douglas BSc MB ChB MRCGP DCH DRCOG

General Practitioner, Exeter;

Professor G. W. Duff MA BM BCh PhD FRCP

Professor of Molecular Medicine, Sheffield University;

Dr. S. J. Eykyn FRCP FRCPath

Reader (Hon Con) in Clinical Microbiology, St. Thomas' Hospital, London;

Professor R. G. Finch FRCP FRCPath FFPM

Professor of Infectious Diseases, Nottinghan University;

Professor A. T. Florence CBE DSc FRSC FRSE FRPharmS

Dean of the School of Pharmacy, London University;

Professor E. C. Gordon-Smith FRCP FRCPath

Professor of Haematology, St. George's Hospital Medical School, London;

Professor K. Gull BSc PhD

Director of the Research and Graduate School, School of Biological Sciences, Manchester University;

Professor H. S. Jacobs MD FRCP FRCOG

Professor of Reproductive Endocrinology, University College and Middlesex School of Medicine, London;

Mrs. E. A. Kay MSc MRPharmS MCPP DMS

Director of Clinical Pharmacy, United Leeds Teaching Hospital Trust;

Dr. M. J. Kendall MD FRCP

Reader in Medicine, Birmingham University;

Dr. B. J. Kirby MD MB ChB FRCP

Consultant Physician and Deputy Director Postgraduate Medical School, Exeter University;

Dr. S. Kumar MBBS MRCGP DCH DPMC

Principal in General Practice, Widnes, Cheshire and Member of the Department of Health's Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs;

Professor M. J. S. Langman BSc MD FRCP

Professor of Medicine and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, Birmingham University;

Dr. A. V. P. MacKay OBE MA BSc PhD MB ChB FRCPsych FRCP

Medical Director of the Argyll and Bute NHS Trust and McIntosh Lecturer in Psychological Medicine, Glasgow University;

Professor J. M. Midgley BSc MSc PhD CChem FRSC FRPharmS;

Professor of Pharmaceutical and Medicinal Chemistry, Strathclyde University;

Professor B. K. Park BSc Phd MRCP

Professor of Pharmacology and Therapeutics, Liverpool University;

Professor B. L. Pentecost MD FRCP

Consultant Physician and Director of British Heart Foundation;

Professor J. C. Petrie FRCP(Ed) FRCP(Lon) FFPM

Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, Aberdeen University;

Professor L. L. Smith PhD FRCPath

Director of the MRC Toxicology Unit, Leicester University;

Dr. K. Verrier Jones MD FRCP

Senior Lecturer in Paediatric Nephrology, Cardiff Royal Infirmary;

Professor M. P. Vessey CBE MD FRCP FFPHM FRS

Professor of Public Health, Oxford University;

Professor I. V. D. Weller MD FRCP

Head of Department of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (a division of Pathology and Infectious Diseases), University College London Medical School.

The Committee on Safety of Medicines is an independent body of drug safety experts. Its members are appointed by the United Kingdom Health Ministers—the licensing authority—following consultations with appropriate organisations and on the recommendations of the Medicines Commission. The organisations consulted include professional associations such as the royal colleges, the pharmaceutical industry, and organisations concerned with the interests of consumers, women and ethnic minorities. Members do not represent organisations, but contribute by their individual expertise and judgment to the advice given by the committee to the licensing authority. In addition, members are required to follow a code of practice on relations with the pharmaceutical industry and to declare their interests which are published annually.

Pinderfields and Pontefract Hospitals Trust

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when, and by whom, approval was given to the placement of newspaper advertisements inviting applications for the chairmanship and non-executive membership of the proposed Pinderfields and Pontefract hospitals trust. [18021]

Mr. Horam: The advertisement was placed by the national health service executive following the decision to establish the new trust.

Cancelled Operations

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of cancelled operations by district health authority for the quarter ending 31 December 1996. [18281]

Mr. Horam: The information requested will be placed in the Library shortly.

NHS Facilities (Repair and Maintenance Backlog)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the outstanding repair and maintenance backlog on NHS facilities by region at the end of December 1996. [18282]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 19 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *529–30*. That is the latest information available.

NHS Finances

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the predicted out-turn position at the end of the third quarter for the financial year 1996–97 for *(a)* each NHS trust and *(b)* each health authority. [18283]

Mr. Horam: The information requested will be placed in the Library shortly.

Milk Tokens and Vitamin Supplements

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many mothers and expectant mothers under 25 years who receive contributions-based jobseeker's allowance are not entitled to milk tokens and vitamin supplements by region and nationally. [18285]

(2) if he will give mothers and expectant mothers under 25 years who receive contributions-based jobseeker's allowance an entitlement to milk tokens and vitamin supplements. [18286]

Mr. Horam: Under the welfare food scheme, milk tokens and vitamin supplements are provided to mothers and expectant mothers who are in receipt of an income-based jobseeker's allowance. We have no plans to extend the entitlement to women receiving a contribution-based jobseeker's allowance.

Congenital Rubella Syndrome

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were born in 1996 with congenital rubella syndrome; and what procedures are in place to train general practitioners to communicate diagnoses to the parents and refer such cases to specialist support services. [18287]

Mr. Horam: The latest year for which centrally collected figures are available is 1994–95, when there were 12 finished consultant episodes in which the primary diagnosis was congenital rubella. Communicating an adverse diagnosis to the parents of sick and disabled children is an extremely challenging task and forms an important part of general practitioners' training. Further guidance is also available to health service staff. The document "Child Health in the Community: A Guide to Good Practice", issued last September by the national health service executive—copies of which are available in the Library—includes a section on the principles involved in breaking bad news and accessing specialist support services, and advice on the training and support needs of staff undertaking this duty.

Accident and Emergency Services (London)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the report of the Greater London Association of Community Health Councils on the accident and emergency services in London; and if he will make a statement on its recommendations. [18289]

Mr. Malone: We have noted the report.

Work has been undertaken by health authorities and trusts to ensure that the service is able to cope with peaks of activity. Every health authority produced an action plan with its trusts in advance of this winter and these arrangements have, in general, worked well. We have made £20 million extra funds available during the current financial year to meet particular pressures, out of which around £4 million is going to health authorities in London.

Broadmoor Hospital

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the High Security Psychiatric Commissioning Board last made an *(a)* planned and *(b)* unplanned visit to Broadmoor. [17820]

Mr. Burns *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* Since its inception on 1 April 1996, the High Security Psychiatric Services Commissioning Board has made numerous visits to Broadmoor. The last visit was on 7 February 1997. The HSPSCB will be making unannounced visits to each of the three high security hospitals, including Broadmoor, from 1 April 1997.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about staffing levels and security matters at Broadmoor and when; and if he will make a statement. [17821]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* I received a letter from Mr. Andy Gossage of the Prison Officers Association on 19 February, which raised various concerns about Broadmoor hospital. In the light of these and other concerns, I have asked the regional director of Anglia and Oxford regional office of the NHS executive to consider the adequacy and appropriateness of security arrangements, and the overall quality of patient care, at Broadmoor hospital, and to report to me with recommendations by the end of March.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the allegations of an assault by a patient on a seven-year-old girl visiting Broadmoor; and what actions his Department has undertaken in respect of the allegation. [17822]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* I understand that these allegations, dating from April 1995, were investigated at that time by both the hospital management and the local police and no evidence was found to warrant further action. The review to be carried out by the Anglia and Oxford regional office of the NHS executive will include in its consideration the arrangements within Broadmoor hospital for handling this and similar allegations.

Special Hospitals

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the current arrangements for monitoring the special hospitals. [17823]

Mr. Burns *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* The current arrangements for monitoring the three high security hospitals are set out in an NHS executive document, "High Secure Psychiatric Services: Changes in Funding and Organisation", which was published in June 1995. Monitoring procedures are regularly reviewed. The hospitals are also regularly visited by the Mental Health Act Commission, whose responsibilities are well set out in the Mental Health Act.

SCOTLAND

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the minimum age requirements enforced by his Department. [15919]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As the information is lengthy, it has been placed in the Library.

Locate In Scotland

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many jobs have been created or safeguarded as a result of action by Locate in Scotland *(a)* by company, *(b)* by region and *(c)* in Scotland, since its establishment; and if he will make a statement. [16542]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 18 February 1997]:* This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Inward investment projects attracted to Scotland since Locate in Scotland was established in 1981 have, however, involved the planned creation or safeguarding of over 130,000 jobs.

Edinburgh Royal Infirmary

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will intervene to stop the Royal Infirmary trust closing the varicose ulcer clinic at the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh. [17510]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This leg ulcer clinic within the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh was established as a research project, the funding for which expires shortly. The trust, in consultation with Lothian health board, is reviewing the range of its vascular surgery services to determine whether there is any way in which existing resources can be used more effectively to enable the leg ulcer clinic to continue.

Prison Construction

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the planned expenditure for constructing prisons in Scotland over the next three years; and what is the design capacity of each planned prison. [17695]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: One new 500-cell prison is planned at Bowhouse, Kilmarnock as part of the private finance initiative. The earliest opening date is 1999, from which time an annual payment would be made by the Scottish Prison Service to the successful contractor for operating the prison, which would include an element to reflect construction costs. Provision to meet the estimated initial costs of the prison is included in the Scottish Prison Service's financial allocation of some £186 million for 1999–2000. Additional prison places required in the light of the early release proposals in the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill would also be financed through the PFI. As the new places would not come on stream until after the time period covered by the Government's current public expenditure plans, no financial provision has yet been made.

Offenders (Release)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary for State for Scotland how many and what percentage of serious offenders were released in Scotland without a supervision order, in each year since 1992. [17694]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available. However, it may be useful to highlight the current legislative requirements in relation to supervision of offenders. Sections 12 and 14 of the Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Act 1993 set out, with effect from 1 October 1993, new provisions in relation to the supervision of prisoners. Section 12 requires that all long-term prisoners—those sentenced to four years or more—will be supervised on release by a relevant local authority officer. Similarly, section 14 enables the courts to order supervision for those short-term prisoners sentenced to between one and four years who may pose a potential risk to the public on

release. This power is exercised by imposing a supervised release order. Measures are therefore in place to ensure the supervision of offenders as appropriate.

The Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, currently before Parliament, contains provisions to extend the availability of the supervised release order. It would provide for mandatory supervision for up to 25 per cent. of sentence for those convicted of the most serious violent offences.

Prison Population

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of Scottish prisoners are currently serving sentences of less than six months; and what percentage of those are female. [17691]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of this question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mrs. Ray Michie, dated 3 March 1997:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about the percentage of Scottish prisoners who are currently serving sentences of less than six months; and the percentage of those that are female.

As at 26 February 1997 13 per cent. (815) of the Scottish prison population were serving sentences of less than six months, 6 per cent. of which (49) were female.

Young Offenders

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons in Scotland aged under 18 years were charged with a criminal offence in 1996. [17693]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information is not collected centrally on the number of persons charged with a criminal offence. In 1994, the latest year for which information is available, there were 10,601 occasions when persons aged under 18 were proceeded against for a criminal offence at court and a further 25,735 occasions when persons aged under 18 were referred to the reporter to the children's panels on offence grounds.

Sex Offenders

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of convicted sex offenders in Scotland who would have been registerable if the provisions of the Sex Offenders Bill had been in force at the time of their conviction. [17799]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No estimate has been made as this is not relevant for the purposes of the Bill.

Food Poisoning

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of food poisoning have been reported in Scotland to date in 1997. [17659]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* By the week ending 15 February 1997, there had been 902 notifications of food poisoning to the Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of reported cases of salmonellosis in Scotland in each year since 1979; and what is the latest available figure for 1997. [17660]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* The following table shows total numbers of Salmonella infections—human laboratory isolates—reported to the Scottish centre for infection and environmental health over the period requested.

Year	*Total*
1979	1,483
1980	1,577
1981	2,526
1982	2,621
1983	2,288
1984	2,221
1985	1,690
1986	2,015
1987	2,286
1988	2,580
1989	2,578
1990	2,442
1991	2,330
1992	2,992
1993	2,919
1994	2,969
1995	3,106
1996	3,266
1997	[1]313

[1] To 21 February 1997.

Farmed Salmon

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many salmon farms in Scotland are permitted to use ivermectin to control sea lice. [17829]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* I understand from the Scottish Environment Protection agency that discharge consents have been granted to 15 Scottish salmon farms in respect of ivermectin which will be used to control sea lice. Twenty-four applications for discharge consent have been refused by the agency.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the letter of the Lord Advocate of 14 February to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, who assessed *(a)* the current role of Mr. James Thurman and *(b)* his former role in respect of the Lockerbie case. [17291]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Issues as to Mr. Thurman's current role are for the relevant United States authorities, but Mr. Thurman's role in respect of the Lockerbie case was considered by the then Lord Advocate, Lord Rodger of Earlsferry, in September 1995. He advised the hon. Member in October 1995 that proof of the case does not depend on evidence which Mr. Thurman might give.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant, to the letter of the Lord Advocate of 14 February, to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, if he has assessed a draft of the US inspector general's report into laboratory practices and alleged misconduct in explosives-related and other cases. [17292]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Lord Advocate has not seen a draft of the US inspector general's report into laboratory practices and alleged misconduct in explosives-related and other cases.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioner Incomes

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide an updated analysis for each quintile of pensioners' income for single pensioners, pensioner couples and all pensioner units on the same basis as that given on 12 March 1996, *Official Report*, columns *595-98*. [14302]

Mr. Heald: The information has been placed in the Library.

Home Responsibilities Protection

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women qualified for home responsibilities protection during each of the past five years, by reason for protection; and what is his estimate of the annual cost of making each year of home responsibilities protection equivalent to a year in which full national insurance credits have been awarded. [15797]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

The Government Actuary's Department has estimated that replacing the home responsibilities protection arrangements with full national insurance credits would cost £150 million in the year 2030.

Reason/Benefit	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Men					
Child benefit	30	36	40	49	57
Income support	—	—	—	—	—
Attendance allowance	1	—	—	—	—
Total	31	36	40	49	57
Women					
Child benefit	2,619	2,688	2,709	2,719	2,700
Income support	—	1	—	—	—
Attendance allowance	2	1	1	1	—
Total	2,621	2,690	2,710	2,720	2,700

Source:
1 per cent. sample of national insurance records at February 1996—DSS Home Responsibilities Protection Statistics 1994–95.
Notes:
1. Figures relate to Great Britain and are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. It is not possible to determine how many of the years will be used in the final pension calculation until the individual claims retirement pension.

Claimants (Exempt Work)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of invalidity benefit were undertaking therapeutic work during the year 1994–95; how many claimants of incapacity benefit have undertaken exempt work since its introduction in 1995; and what is his estimate of *(a)* the annual cost and *(b)* the numbers affected if the therapeutic work rules were reintroduced into incapacity benefit. [16098]

Mr. Burt: The information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Retirement Incomes

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the average wealth and income, other than the basic state retirement pension, of people retiring at the present time and at convenient intervals in the past 30 years. [15844]

Mr. Heald: The latest available information is contained in "The Pensioners' Incomes Series 1994–95". This shows that recently retired pensioner units[1] have a mean average gross income of £235.60 per week, 58 per cent. of which is from a source other than state benefits[2]. The earliest data available form the Pensioners' Income Series is 1974 (23 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *171–76*). Information for intervening years has been published in the annual "Social Security Statistics" since 1993. Further details about pensioner households are given in the annual "Households Below Average Income" statistics.

Copies of all these publications are available in the Library.

Notes:

[1] A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over state pension age or a couple where the man, defined as the head, is over SPA. A recently retired pensioner unit is defined as a pensioner unit where the head of the benefit unit is less than five years older than SPA.

[2] *Source:* The Pensioners' Income Series 1994–95.

1. Figures quoted are at July 1994 prices.

Benefit Claimants (Earnings)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the levels of gross earnings at which *(a)* single people, *(b)* lone parents, *(c)* couples without children and *(d)* couples with children face marginal deduction rates in excess of 100 per cent. for *(e)* 1996–97 and *(f)* 1997–98; and what are the numbers affected in each group. [16301]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The gross earnings at which different family types face marginal deduction rates in excess of 100 per cent. depends on the individual characteristics of the claim.

Information on the marginal deduction rates faced by certain family types across a range of gross earnings is available in the April 1996 tax benefit model tables, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment his Department has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16315]

Mr. Roger Evans: Assessments have been completed on hazardous materials in buildings we occupy under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994 and risks identified have been recorded as required by the legislation.

Arrangements for storage and disposal of hazardous waste conform to the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

An assessment has been made of ozone-depleting substances and a target date set for replacement.

The policy of this Department is to minimise the use of substances which are hazardous to human health or to the environment and to eliminate the use of all ozone-depleting substances such as chlorofluorocarbons and halons.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people under the age of 25 years have had their housing benefit reduced to single room rent levels; what savings in public expenditure have so far been made as a result of this policy; and what evaluation has been undertaken by his Department of the impact of the policy on the finances and housing situation of young people. [16302]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not yet available.

However, the introduction of the single room rent restriction is being monitored. Information on the operation of the changes, based on data supplied by a sample of local authorities, will be available in late summer.

The Department is putting into place a series of research projects for evaluation of the long term effects of the changes. Results are expected next year.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the amount of housing benefit fraud detected by local authorities during 1995–96; how many claimants were involved; what was the average amount of overpaid benefit per claimant; and how many prosecutions were instigated in that year. [16665]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The amount of housing benefit fraud detected by local authorities in 1995–96 was £186 million[1].

There were 114,300 overpayments, totalling £43 million, which were attributable to fraud[2].

Figures on the number of prosecutions instigated are currently being processed and will be available in early March.

Notes:

[1] Based on the weekly benefit savings method of accounting. No central records are kept of the number of claimants involved in detected housing benefit fraud.

[2] The number of overpayments does not reflect the number of claimants involved in each fraud, so it is not possible to give an average amount per claimant.

Source:

Local authority 1995–96 subsidy claims.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients there currently are of housing benefit in *(a)* north Devon and *(b)* Devon; and how many of these are under 25 years of age. [15003]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

In May 1996, there were 6,100 housing benefit recipients in the North Devon district council area and 78,200 in the whole of Devon.

Notes:

1. Estimates of the numbers of recipients aged under 25 are not available below regional level.

2. Recipients may be a single person or a couple.

Mr. Austin Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the amount of housing benefit subsidy paid to local authorities in England in respect of rent allowances in each of the years from 1991–92 to 1996–97; what is his estimate for 1997–98; and what is his estimate of the housing benefit subsidy that would have been paid in each of those years if local authorities had continued to receive 97 per cent. subsidy. [15163]

Mr. Evans *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* The information is in the table.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 30 January, *Official Report*, column *362*.

The reduction from 97 per cent. to 95 per cent. in the rate of direct subsidy which local authorities receive for the majority of their private sector housing benefit expenditure was made with effect from 1 April 1991 on a cost neutral basis. Local authorities were compensated for the reduction in direct subsidy by an appropriate addition to the revenue support grant.

Allowance expenditure

Year	*Subsidy paid (£ million)*
1991–92	1,926
1992–93	2,630
1993–94	3,444
1994–95	4,217
1995–96	[1]4,511

Allowance expenditure

Year	*Subsidy paid (£ million)*
1996–97	[1]4,645
1997–98	[1]5,065

Notes:
[1] Figures are estimated.
Sources:
1991–92 to 1994–95—DSS appropriation accounts.
1995–96 to 1997–98—based on figures contained in table 1 of the social security departmental report, "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1996–97 to 1998–99".

Child Care Disregard

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report* columns *254–5*, if he will indicate how many claimants would gain from extending the child care disregard to those on family credit subject to a 70 per cent. and 50 per cent. taper. [16668]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is as follows:

Numbers gaining from extending the childcare disregard to those on family credit subject to a 70 per cent. and 50 per cent. taper 1996 prices

	Number of gainers
70 per cent. taper	12,000
50 per cent. taper	12,000

1. Figures are based on the May 1996 family credit statistics, and use actual child care recipients at that time.
2. Estimates do not include behavioural effects.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the numbers gaining if the child care disregard with (i) family credit and (ii) disability working allowance applied to each child under age 11 years. [16671]

Mr. Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 24 January, *Official Report*, column *772*.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 31 October, *Official Report* column *245*, what progress has been made in changes to benefit delivery in Yorkshire, the west country and east London and Anglia directorates; when he expects proposals for change to be submitted by the consortiums of private companies; and what elements he expects to be run by the private sector. [16669]

Mr. Roger Evans: No changes to benefit delivery have been made in the relevant areas.

The partnerships between three private companies or consortia and the Benefits Agency area directorates are expected to start in early May and last for approximately 12 months.

The partnership period will give the private companies or consortia the opportunity to work closely with managers and staff, enabling them to understand Benefits Agency business. The private companies or consortia involved in the partnerships will not run the area directorates, or any other part of the agency during the partnership period.

By the end of the partnership period, the private companies or consortia will be expected to provide proposals on how the agency's business can be delivered more efficiently, effectively and economically, including the possibility of further parts of the operation being run by the private sector. Proposals can be submitted at any time during the partnership period.

Until the private companies or consortia submit their proposals, it is not possible to determine what changes may be made.

Family Credit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant, to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *535*, what estimate he has made of the numbers gaining from a maintenance disregard for lone parents of *(a)* £5 and *(b)* £10. [16670]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *535*. Some 240,000 lone parents would gain from the introduction of a maintenance disregard of £5, £10 or £20 a week.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which benefits people are entitled to when they are refused incapacity benefit but cannot meet the availability for work criteria of the means-tested jobseeker's allowance due to illness or disability. [17878]

Mr. Roger Evans: Those found capable of work following an all-work test for incapacity benefit, but who have a continuing medical condition or disability, are able to restrict their availability for work and qualify for jobseeker's allowance, provided that the restrictions are reasonable in the light of their physical or mental condition.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what benefits are available to people awaiting an appeal against a Department of Social Security decision to refuse incapacity benefit. [17879]

Mr. Burt: Those people awaiting an appeal hearing after failing the all-work test for incapacity benefit may register with the Employment Service and claim jobseeker's allowance. Those who are not seeking work may, provided that they satisfy the entitlement conditions, receive income support.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if people refused incapacity benefit and awaiting an appeal decision who have sufficient national insurance contributions qualify for non-means-tested jobseeker's allowance as a matter of right. [17881]

Mr. Evans: Those who have paid sufficient national insurance contributions may receive a personal rate of contributions-based jobseeker's allowance for up to six months, provided that they satisfy the labour market conditions.

Claim Processing Costs

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the unit cost for processing claims for *(a)* income support, *(b)* income support for lone parents,

(c) income support for pensioners, *(d)* child benefit, *(e)* family credit, *(f)* the basic state pension, *(g)* incapacity benefit and *(h)* contributory jobseeker's allowance; and *(i)* means-tested jobseeker's allowance; [18236]

(2) what is the unit cost for processing claims for *(a)* income support, *(b)* income support for lone parents, *(c)* income support for pensioners, *(d)* child benefit, *(e)* family credit, *(f)* the basic state pension, *(g)* incapacity benefit, *(h)* contributory jobseeker's allowance and (i) means-tested jobseeker's allowance in Yorkshire; [18232]

(3) what is the unit cost for processing claims for *(a)* income support, *(b)* income support for lone parents, *(c)* income support for pensioners, *(d)* child benefit, *(e)* family credit, *(f)* the basic state pension, *(g)* incapacity benefit, *(h)* contributory jobseeker's allowance and *(i)* means-tested jobseeker's allowance in Wales. [18233]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. The Department publishes figures for the average weekly administration cost per beneficiary, for the main benefits, in its annual departmental report. The report for 1996–97 is due to be published shortly.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the unit cost for handling inquiries by claimants in person in Benefits Agency offices for *(a)* income support, *(b)* income support for lone parents, *(c)* income support for pensioners, *(d)* child benefit, *(e)* family credit, *(f)* the basic state pension, *(g)* incapacity benefit, *(h)* contributory jobseeker's allowance and *(i)* means-tested jobseeker's allowance. [18235]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available in the format requested.

The average unit cost, excluding overheads, for dealing with a caller in the Benefits Agency is £1.84.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the unit cost for handling inquiries from claimants by telephone for *(a)* income support, *(b)* income support for lone parents, *(c)* income support for pensioners, *(d)* child benefit, *(e)* family credit, *(f)* the basic state pension, *(g)* incapacity benefit, *(h)* contributory jobseeker's allowance and *(i)* means-tested jobseeker's allowance. [18234]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available.

Camborne Benefits Agency Office

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will reopen Camborne Benefits Agency office in Cornwall; and if he will make a statement. [17937]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison To Mr. David Jamieson, dated 28 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will reopen Camborne Benefits Agency office in Cornwall.

I can confirm that the Camborne advice shop, which was temporarily closed on 8 January, will reopen on 3 March 1997.

The Advice Shop service, which does not have benefit processing or payment facilities, was suspended in order that staff could be redeployed to cover temporary absences and to deal with a greater than predicted take up of Job Seekers Allowance. The number of claims received have now reduced to anticipated levels. More staff will have completed their training which will in turn release staff to their usual duties. This will enable normal service to be resumed at the Advice Shop.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 March 1997

WALES

Glamorgan

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what factors underlay the decision not to recreate the historic county of Glamorgan as a unitary authority. [18505]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The fundamental principles underpinning local government reorganisation were that: local authorities should be democratically accountable to their electorate; the roles of local authorities, and their responsibilities for service delivery, should be clearly understood by local people; local authority boundaries should, as far as possible, reflect and strengthen existing community loyalties; and local public services should be of high quality, and be efficient, economical and effective.

Wherever practicable, Ministers attempted to recreate the pre-1974 counties, but a unitary authority based on the historic administrative boundaries of Glamorgan would have resulted in a unitary authority of some 1.3 million electors—far too large to accord satisfactorily with all the principles set out.

TREASURY

London Transport Funding

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, columns *118–19*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the Lord Mayor of London's letter to him and his response on London Transport's investment programme. [15911]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have placed in the Library copies of the correspondence referred to.

London Underground (Privatisation Receipts)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the receipts that will accrue to the Treasury as a result of the sale of London Underground. [18625]

Mr. Jack: Proceeds will depend on the structural option selected for the sale and the level of demand from bidders.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with which airlines and travel companies he has recently had discussions about the enforcement of CITES regulations; and what has been the response in each case. [17837]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 February 1997]*: I have written to a number of airlines and travel companies, as I explained on 13 February in my answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), *Official Report*, column 448, seeking their participation in an initiative aimed at producing a video for in-flight display aimed at enhancing the CITES profile and environmentally responsible tourism.

The airlines I contacted were Aer Lingus, Aeroflot, Air Canada, Air France, Air India, Air UK Ltd., Alitilia Airlines, American Airlines, Bangladesh Airlines, British Airways, British Midland Airways, Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd., Continental Airlines, Cyprus Airways, Egyptair, El Al Airlines, Finnair, Ghana Airways, Iberia Airlines, Kenya Airways, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, Lufthansa Airlines, Malaysia Airlines, Middle East Airlines, Monarch Airlines, Olympic Airways, Pakistan International Airlines, Qantas Airways, Royal Jordanian Airlines, Sabena Airlines, Singapore Airlines, South African Airways, Swissair, United Airlines and Virgin Atlantic.

Airtours, Leisure International Airways, Iberia, Kenya Airways, and Singapore Airlines have already agreed to show the video as part of their in-flight entertainment. British Airways has asked for a meeting to discuss the technical detail. Lufthansa and United Airways have referred the matter to their head offices. Air France, Air UK, and KLM all indicated that they have no in-flight entertainment on their UK services. Other airlines, including Virgin Atlantic, have yet to respond but replies have been solicited through follow-up letters.

The following tour operators and travel agents were contacted: Airtours plc, Althams Travel Services Ltd., American Express Europe Ltd., Avro plc, Bakers Dolphin, Britannic Travel Ltd., British Airways Holidays Ltd., British Airways Travel Shops Ltd., Carlson Wagonlit Travel, Co-operative Wholesale Society Ltd., Cosmosair plc, Cresta Holidays Ltd., Crystal Holidays Ltd., Dawson and Sanderson Ltd., First Choice Holidays and Flights Ltd., Going Places Leisure Travel Ltd., Gold Medal Travel Group plc, Hogg Robinson (Travel) Ltd., Hotel Plan Ltd., Inspirations East Ltd., Kuoni Travel Ltd., Lunn Poly Ltd., Midlands Co-operative Society Ltd., MTG (UK) Ltd. (AT Mays and The Travel Agents), Portman Travel Ltd., STA Travel Ltd., Sunset Holidays plc, Sunworld Ltd., Thomas Cook Group Ltd., Thomson Tour Operations Ltd., Trailfinders Ltd., The Travel Company Ltd., Travel 2 Ltd., Unijet Travel Ltd., United Norwest Co-operatives Ltd., Virgin Holidays Ltd. and Woodcock Travel Ltd.

Airtours plc, Co-operative Wholesale Society Ltd., Hogg Robinson, Midlands Co-operative Society Ltd. (Co-op Travel), Trailfinders Ltd., Unijet Travel Ltd., United Norwest Co-operatives Ltd. (Co-op Travel) are lending support by agreeing to distribute associated literature. Bakers Dolphin explained that it covers the issue in its existing leaflets.

Britannic Travel Ltd., Carlson Wagonlit Travel, AT Mays and The Travel Agents, and Virgin Holidays Ltd. replied that for a variety of practical reasons they were unable to participate. As with the airlines, other correspondents have yet to reply but we are optimistic of receiving further positive responses in the near future.

I will be announcing further details in due course.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue received from air passenger duty at *(a)* the lower rate and *(b)* the higher rate on traffic in and out of the Scottish isles in 1995–96. [17944]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* Customs' estimate of revenue received from air passenger duty on flights in and out of the Scottish isles in the financial year 1995–96 is *(a)* for the lower rate of £5, about £3 million and *(b)* for the higher rate of £10, less than £1 million.

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue received from air passenger duty on domestic United Kingdom flights in and out of the Scottish isles in 1995–96. [17945]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* Customs' estimate of revenue received from air passenger duty on domestic United Kingdom flights in and out of the Scottish isles in the financial year 1995–96 is about £2 million.

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue received from air passenger duty at *(a)* the lower rate and *(b)* the higher rate of traffic in and out of Northern Ireland in 1995–96. [17946]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* Customs' estimate of revenue received from air passenger duty on flights in and out of Northern Ireland in the financial year 1995–96 is *(a)* for the lower rate of £5, about £13 million and (b) for the higher rate of £10, less than £1 million.

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue received from air passenger duty on domestic United Kingdom flights in and out of Northern Ireland in 1995–96. [17947]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* Customs' estimate of revenue received from air passenger duty on domestic United Kingdom flights in and out of Northern Ireland in the financial year 1995–96 is about £12 million.

Illegal Firearms (Imports)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his Department's latest estimate of the number of illegal firearms entering the United Kingdom *(a)* via the channel tunnel and *(b)* via other points of access in each of the last five years. [18129]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 3 March 1997]:* Customs does not hold central statistics of the number of illegal firearms entering the UK broken down in this way. The following table sets out the number of firearms seized by customs since 1992.

Year ended 31 March	*Hand guns*	*Rifles*	*Shot guns*	*Total*
1992	176	126	82	384
1993	138	41	39	218
1994	94	338	49	481
1995	261	49	111	421
1996	[1]13,342	61	124	[1]13,527
Totals	[1]14,011	615	405	[1]15,031

[1] The large number of handguns seized was due to a single seizure of 13,260 flares incorporating barrels which are regarded as firearms within the meaning of the Firearms Acts.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersen, *(c)* BMI, *(d)* Sema and *(e)* Capita since 1992 and the broad function to be carried out by the contractor and the value of the contract in each case. [17610]

Mr. Howard: The contracts let by my Department since 1992 are as follows:

Contractor	*Date*	*Function*
(a) EDS	1992	Consultancy for harmonisation of equipment standards—Police Information Technology Organisation.
	1992	Consultancy for software development—Police Information Technology Organisation.
	1992	Consultancy on Neural Network Learning—Police Information Technology Organisation.
		Total: £73,000
(b) Andersen	No contracts have been awarded to this company in the period specified.	
(c) BMI	No contracts have been awarded to this company in the period specified.	
(d) Sema	1994	Call-off contract for the provision of computer and software services—Home Office and Agencies.
		Total: £26,000,000
(e) Capita	1993	Consultancy support to the in-house bid of Statistics Division—main Home Office.
	1994	Consultancy support for the in-house bid for market test of prisons—Prison Service.
	1995	Support for F8 Division review—main Home Office.
	1995	Provision of a temporary project director for the Procurement Management Information System (PROMIS)—Home Office.
	1995	Post implementation review—Home Office.
	1995	Standards Consultancy—Home Office.
	1996	Helpdesk performance review—Home Office.
	1996	Quantum Project Recruitment—Prison Service.

Contractor	Date	Function
	1997	Switchboard. Post implementation review—Home Office.
	1997	Assisting with benchmarking of Police Inspectorates—Home Office.
	1992–97	Architectural professional construction services on projects.
		Total £450,000

Alcohol Sales (Young People)

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prosecutions have been brought against licensees for selling alcohol to people under the age of 18 years since 1988; [18150]

(2) how many licensees have been successfully prosecuted for selling alcohol to people under the age of 18 years since 1988; [18151]

(3) how many off-licence proprietors have been successfully prosecuted for selling alcohol to people under the age of 18 years since 1988; [18153]

(4) how many prosecutions have been brought against off-licence proprietors for selling alcohol to people under the age of 18 years since 1988. [18152]

Mr. Maclean: Information collected centrally under section 169(1) of the Licensing Act 1964—selling intoxicating liquor to persons under 18—does not separately identify the type of licensee involved.

The table shows the number of prosecutions and convictions in England and Wales from 1988 to 1995 for this offence.

Persons prosecuted and convicted for offences under section 169 (1) of the Licensing Act 1964—selling intoxicating liquor to persons under 18, 1988–1995

England and Wales

	Prosecutions	Convictions
1988	673	357
1989	747	388
1990	574	273
1991	309	155
1992	195	87
1993	156	70
1994	137	83
1995	198	108

Identity Cards

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy that the proposed voluntary national identity card will eventually become compulsory for United Kingdom subjects. [18246]

Mr. Sackville: The Government's policy is for the national identity card to be voluntary. It may in practice be held very widely, but there are no plans for it to become compulsory.

Mr. Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy that the proposed national identity card will be electronically linked to the police national computer database. [18219]

Mr. Sackville: Decisions have not yet been taken on the practical arrangements for storing identity card data, but there are no plans for an electronic link between the national identity card and the database of the police national computer.

Philip Saunders

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to inquire into the assistance given by public agencies to Ms Sharon Saunders of Bolton in her efforts to break the drug addiction of her late son; if he will order a public inquiry into the case; and if he will make a statement. [18143]

Mr. Sackville: As I am sure the hon. Member is aware, an inquest is to be held into the death of Philip Saunders. We will consider any issues that arise from the inquest in respect of services for which the Home Office is responsible.

CS Gas

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times during 1996 CS gas was used by police in the Metropolitan police area. [17962]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that during 1996 the Metropolitan police has used CS incapacitant spray on 120 occasions.

Casino Operations (Croydon)

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to designate Croydon as a permitted area for casino operation. [17975]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Home Office issued consultation papers in February and November 1996 proposing 21 new permitted areas for casinos, including Croydon. We are currently considering the responses to the November proposals.

Victim Support

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the responsibilities of local authorities in relation to victim support initiatives. [18258]

Mr. Maclean: I am not aware that local authorities have any formal responsibilities in relation to victim support initiatives. However, I understand that many local authorities do provide financial support to their local victim support schemes, and that the total amount of such support provided in 1995–96 was in the order of £1.4 million.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was his Department's financial contribution to the National Association of Victim Support Schemes in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [18259]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is as follows:

Financial year	*Home Office grant (£ million)*
1992–93	7.260
1993–94	8.375
1994–95	10.016
1995–96	10.817
1996–97	11.682

This generous funding has enabled Victim Support to achieve nationwide coverage with its 365 local schemes and branches and to establish a witness support service at all 77 Crown court centres. The Home Office grant meets the salary and related costs of over 600, full-time equivalent staff, who deploy over 12,000 volunteers to offer practical help and emotional support to well over 1 million victims of crime a year.

Rabies

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons rabies is singled out for particular attention in his Department's publication "Essential Information for United Kingdom passport-holders". [18361]

Mr. Kirkhope: It is felt desirable to warn British passport holders travelling abroad of the potential dangers of rabies as it is still endemic in certain parts of the world, such as the Indian sub-continent, where over 10,000 deaths a year are directly attributable to the disease.

The "Essential Information" publication, issued with all British passports, provides helpful advice and reminders to passport holders about sensible precautions which they can take when going abroad. The inclusion of factual information about rabies is still considered highly appropriate.

Children (Crime)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for preventing children offending. [18914]

Mr. Howard: The Government attach a high priority to dealing with juvenile crime. We have acted to provide the courts with the powers they need to deal effectively with serious and persistent young offenders; and we have acted to reduce the use of inappropriate cautioning. But it would be better if young people did not offend in the first place.

We have, therefore, developed proposals for a new strategy which aims to reduce the risk of children turning to crime. The strategy is based on research about the effectiveness of early intervention with children. We propose that it should be delivered by local agencies, including those in the voluntary sector, working together in partnership in a new local organisation, which might be known as a child crime team. Its task would be to identify children at risk of offending at an early age, and refer them to programmes designed to help them stay clear of crime. A Home Office research study published today—"Reducing Criminality among Young People", by David Utting—describes a selection of the kinds of programme that might be effective.

Parents have a very important role to play in bringing up their children to respect the law. Most parents face up to their responsibilities, and we believe that they would co-operate with suitable programmes which reduced the risk of their children turning to crime. But there is a small minority of parents who do not bring up their children responsibly and who may refuse to accept any support that is offered. To meet that situation, we propose to give the courts a new power to make a parental control order requiring parents to exercise proper care and control over their children. The courts would be able to attach conditions, such as attendance at a suitable programme. The order would be available both where a child aged 10 to 16 had committed an offence, and where no offence had been committed but a child of any age up to 16 had demonstrated unruly behaviour likely to lead to offending.

These proposals are contained in a Green Paper which had been published today. I have placed a copy in the Library.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the results of the latest CCTV challenge competition; and if he will make a statement. [18915]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend will be announcing the results of the 1997–98 closed circuit television challenge competition on Wednesday 5 March. Details of the successful bids will be placed in the Library. A total of £15 million is being made available in this competition.

Data Protection

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the responses to the March 1996 consultation paper on the EC data protection directive (95/46/EC). [18916]

Mr. Sackville: I am today placing a summary of the responses in the Library.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

British Beers

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee if he will ensure that British beers are available as an option at all receptions booked in the House where the House catering facilities are used. [18263]

Sir Colin Shepherd: I am advised by the Director of Catering Services that British beers are available for all functions booked with the House of Commons Refreshment Department. The precise range of drinks served at any reception is a matter for agreement with the function organiser.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many hon. Members representing English constituencies addressed oral or supplementary questions to the Secretary of State for Scotland in the Session 1995–96. [18639]

Mr. Newton: The figures, supplied by the parliamentary on-line information service unit, are:

Number	*Member*
7	John Marshall
5	Ian Bruce
5	Simon Coombs
5	Lady Olga Maitland
5	James Pawsey
4	Jacques Arnold
4	Toby Jessel
3	Matthew Banks
3	Iain Duncan-Smith
3	Teresa Gorman
3	Neil Hamilton
3	David Shaw
3	Robert Spink
3	Anthony Steen
3	Michael Stephen
2	Thomas Arnold
2	Henry Bellingham
2	David Congdon
2	Alan Duncan
2	Jim Marshall
2	Patrick Nicholls
1	Peter Atkinson
1	Spencer Batiste
1	Peter Brooke
1	Michael Brown
1	Dale Campbell-Savours
1	John Carlisle
1	Anthony Coombs
1	Stephen Day
1	Tim Devlin
1	Bob Dunn
1	Hugh Dykes
1	Nigel Evans
1	Harry Greenway
1	John Greenway
1	Bernard Jenkin
1	David Knox
1	David Lidington
1	Michael Lord
1	Tony Marlow
1	Piers Merchant
1	Irvine Patnick
1	Gordon Prentice
1	Andrew Rowe
1	John Sykes
1	Richard Tracey
1	Nicholas Winterton

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid Projects

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which United Kingdom aid projects were not subject to competitive tendering procedures in the country in which they were to take place; how much money was involved in each case; what was the relative percentage of those cases identified of the aid budget for that year; and who were the recipients of any moneys paid in each year since 1980. [18402]

Dr. Liam Fox: It is ODA's policy that wherever practicable, and to ensure value for money, bilateral aid projects should be competitively tendered in the United Kingdom or in the recipient country. In many cases, however, the additional cost of tendering, particularly on smaller projects, outweighs the potential savings to the taxpayer and the recipient country. In such cases a waiver to tender is applied.

In the current financial year to date, about 46 per cent. of ODA expenditure on contracts let for the provision of goods and services were subject to competitive tendering. Figures for in-country expenditure and tendering are not kept centrally in ODA. These details and those of specific projects could not, therefore be provided without disproportionate cost.

EU Social Summit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy in respect of the 1995 EU social summit 20:20 initiative; and if he will make a statement. [18680]

Dr. Liam Fox: The 20:20 initiative was discussed at the 1995 United Nations social summit in Copenhagen. Interested developed and developing countries agreed to allocate, on average, 20 per cent. of development assistance and 20 per cent. of national budgets respectively, to basic social services.

The United Kingdom expressed reservations about certain aspects of the initiative, including lack of clarity about definitions and its excessive focus on inputs, not results. However, the United Kingdom attaches importance to development assistance in the area of basic social services and is willing to discuss the initiative with recipients who raise it on a bilateral basis.

Family Planning

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the UK will be spending *(a)* in the current year and *(b)* in each of the next five years on overseas family planning programmes, indicating the amount per geographical area; and if he will make a statement. [18681]

Dr. Liam Fox: No specific allocation is made for family planning programmes in the development assistance budget. Expenditure on population and reproductive health—which includes family planning—in 1995 was £62.3 million. The figure for 1996 is not yet available. Commitment figures from 1994 onwards are strong and we expect the level of expenditure to remain substantial in the next five financial years. So far the majority of this expenditure is in Africa and to a lesser extent Asia, with smaller amounts being spent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and central and eastern Europe.

Food Crops (Aid)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much of the United Kingdom aid programme was *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly devoted to promoting food production for local consumption; how much was devoted to promoting cash crop production for export; and what are these figures as a percentage of the total aid programme in each year since 1979. [18020]

Dr. Liam Fox: ODA does not maintain data covering the specific information on food production and cash crop production in the form requested for the period 1979 to 1986. It would, therefore, not be possible to provide a detailed answer for the period 1979 to 1986 without disproportionate cost. However, from 1987–88 onwards the information requested as a percentage of the total bilateral aid programme is contained in the table.

Promotion of food production under the UK bilateral aid programme

Financial year	New commitments devoted to direct[1] promotion £	New commitments as a percentage of total annual bilateral aid programme (direct)	New commitments devoted to indirect[2] promotion £	New commitments as a percentage of total annual bilateral aid programme (indirect)
1987–88	147,732,000	18.72	38,333,634	4.86
1988–89	25,120,251	2.93	16,700,176	1.95
1989–90	48,508,063	4.84	22,278,657	2.22
1990–91	46,685,531	4.45	15,900,996	1.51
1991–92	53,206,595	4.95	24,688,720	2.30
1992–93	46,370,484	4.12	37,603,350	3.34
1993–94	53,621,729	4.64	15,699,531	1.36
1994–95	25,048,368	2.24	36,022,357	3.22
1995–96	30,348,874	2.76	22,485,344	2.04

[1] Direct promotion; any activity which has the promotion of food production for local consumption as a stated objective or output.
[2] Indirect promotion; any activity which does not have an explicit objective to promote food production for local consumption.

Promotion of cash crop production under the UK bilateral aid programme

Financial year	New commitments devoted to direct[1] promotion £	New commitments as a percentage of total annual bilateral aid programme (direct)	New commitments devoted to indirect[2] promotion £	New commitments as a percentage of total annual bilateral aid programme (indirect)
1987–88	27,735,095	3.52	7,957,901	1.01
1988–89	3,143,623	0.37	5,814,928	0.68
1989–90	26,016,905	2.60	507,021	0.05
1990–91	349,391	0.03	946,866	0.09
1991–92	2,308,567	0.21	1,602,335	0.12
1992–93	19,454,644	1.72	4,117,628	0.37
1993–94	2,035,540	0.18	2,471,516	0.22
1994–95	2,360,001	0.21	3,284,624	0.29
1995–96	112,360	0.01	2,007,882	0.18

[1] Direct promotion; any activity which has the promotion of exports of cash crops as a stated objective or output.
[2] Indirect promotion; any activity which does not have an explicit objective to increase the export of cash crops, but addresses crops that do have export potential.

International Development Association

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in implementing the agreement reached in Tokyo last year on the 11th replenishment of the International Development Association. [18918]

Dr. Liam Fox: Under the arrangements established at Tokyo, it was agreed that, in the first year of the new IDA triennium, the United States would aim to pay off its arrears to the 10th replenishment of IDA and the rest of the donor community would contribute to an interim trust fund for that year: procurement opportunities from this fund would be limited to contributors—and developing countries—thus excluding the United States. There would be a traditional burden-sharing arrangement for the final two years of the replenishment, with no restrictions.

The interim trust fund has now been established and is operational: the selection and approval process is under way in respect of some $2.3 billion-worth of projects—out of a total of some $3.3 billion. Parliament has approved our own contribution to the trust fund and we have deposited the promissory note.

However, despite this progress, the United States Administration have sought a relaxation of the procurement restrictions in order to try and ensure that Congress will approve the funds to meet both the IDA-10 arrears and their pledge to IDA-11. Following a meeting of senior officials on 6 and 7 February in Paris, it has not been agreed to adjust the trust fund arrangements. In short, an amount of uncommitted trust fund money—limited to SDR700 million (around $1 billion)—is to be held back pending the results of congressional deliberations on the United States Administration's request for finance to cover both the IDA-10 arrears and the first tranche of the US contribution to IDA-11 proper. The result will not be known until the autumn at the earliest when the issue will be discussed further among IDA contributors.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

State Visit (President of Israel)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what issues were raised during his discussions with the Israeli President during his state visit to the United Kingdom. [18624]

Mr. Hanley: President Weizman's discussions with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary covered bilateral relations, which are excellent, and regional issues including recent developments in the middle east peace process.

PRIME MINISTER

Sir Nicholas Lloyd

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Prime Minister what advisory function Sir Nicholas Lloyd is carrying out on his behalf; and if there is any resultant cost to public funds. [18341]

The Prime Minister: Sir Nicholas Lloyd is not carrying out any advisory functions for me as Prime Minister and therefore there is no cost to public funds.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 March. [17369]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 March. [17370]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Gulf War Syndrome

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Prime Minister if he received a letter from Hilary Meredith of the solicitors firm of Donn and Co. in July 1995 enclosing documents concerning the use of organophosphate pesticides by British forces during the Gulf war. [18658]

The Prime Minister: My Office received correspondence in 1995, which was passed to the Ministry of Defence.

TRANSPORT

Policy Initiatives

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to which policy initiative he has devoted most funding in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement on progress with each such initiative. [15084]

Mr. Bowis: The annual transport reports give details of the Department's expenditure and progress with programmes. The 1997 transport report is due to be published on 20 March.

Air Traffic Control (North Sea)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to develop satellite communication-based positive air traffic control arrangements for offshore industry helicopter operations in the North sea beyond radar coverage. [16827]

Mr. Bowis: The Civil Aviation Authority's National Air Traffic Services Ltd. already provides air traffic services to helicopters over the North sea using satellite communications. Radar coverage in the UK sector of the North sea is adequate and currently there are no plans to develop satellite-based surveillance systems in this area.

Traffic Calming

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of total expenditure on traffic-calming measures by transport authorities in England in each of the last three years. [18460]

Mr. Bowis: Traffic calming is one element among the traffic management techniques available to local authorities for relieving congestion, improving safety and enhancing the environment. We do not require detailed returns from authorities on expenditure of this kind.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated concerning (i) good and bad practice in respect of traffic-calming measures in England and (ii) the overall effect of such measures; and if he will make a statement. [18459]

Mr. Bowis: Since April 1992, the Department of Transport has commissioned 10 research projects to study a range of traffic-calming measures, assessing their effectiveness in reducing and controlling traffic speeds and their effect on the environment:

UG16 Traffic calming on distributor roads

UG24 Speed control humps

UG25 Traffic calming on roads through villages

UG46 Innovative traffic calming measures

UG48 Traffic calming on major roads

UG93 Environment management

UG127 Traffic management and vehicle emissions

UG128 Urban activity in 20 mph zones

UG137 Vertical and horizontal deflections

S204F Monitoring of 20 mph zones

Details of most of these projects are in the Department's "Urban and Local Transport Compendium of Research Projects", copies of which have been placed in the Library and can be seen on the Department's Internet site.

The results of this research are published in the form of research reports and traffic advisory leaflets.

Epping to Ongar Train Service

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the disposal of the Epping to Ongar line; and what commitment will be sought from prospective purchasers about the restoration of a train service. [18441]

Mr. Bowis: The conditions which the former Secretary of State attached to the closure of the Epping to Ongar line required London Underground to seek a private operator for the line. I understand that London Underground has identified a preferred bidder following an open competition. The details of the negotiations are a commercial matter for London Underground. If it seeks the Secretary of State's consent to a disposal to the preferred bidder, he will want to be satisfied that the proposed operator is committed to running a train service.

Rural Residents (Buses)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the number of rural residents who live more than half a mile from a bus route; and if he will make a statement. [18405]

Mr. Watts: Information from the national travel survey indicates that about 12 per cent. of rural residents live further than 13 minutes, walking time from a bus stop, which equates to about half a mile in distance.

Vehicle Licence Fraud

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the loss of revenue caused by the display of fraudulent vehicle excise licences. [18577]

Mr. Bowis: This figure cannot be established separately from the estimated loss through evasion of vehicle excise duty. The amount involved is likely to be minimal.

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to combat the practice of motorists displaying fraudulent vehicle excise licenses. [18576]

Mr. Bowis: This is a matter for the police. We have no evidence to suggest that the practice is widespread.

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the loss of revenue caused by motorists not obtaining vehicle excise licences. [18568]

Mr. Bowis: The estimated vehicle excise duty loss through evasion in Great Britain in 1995–96 was £170 million. This represents 4.1 per cent. of the total revenue due. Over £74 million of this total was recouped through enforcement action undertaken by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to address the problem of motorists failing to display vehicle excise licences. [18569]

Mr. Bowis: The offence of failure to display a vehicle licence is dealt with by the police under the fixed penalty procedures. In addition, police and traffic wardens pass offence reports to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency for enforcement action if the vehicle is unlicensed. Last year successful action was taken against nearly 500,000 unlicensed motorists.

London Underground

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his objection of clearing the investment backlog within five years of privatisation of London Underground will be a contractual commitment for purchasers. [18660]

Mr. Bowis: The privatisation of London Underground will be structured so as to ensure that the underground's infrastructure is modernised as soon as possible. Our aim is to achieve this within five years. The exact mechanism for delivering this commitment depends on the structural option chosen. Further details will be included in the White Paper that we aim to publish this summer.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what mechanisms he will put in place to ensure that fares will not rise following the privatisation of London Underground; and if purchasers will be under a contractual obligation not to increase fares; [18662]

(2) what safeguards will apply to employees' pension rights and travel concessions in legislation introduced to privatise London Underground; [18629]

(3) what proposals he has to ensure that a guaranteed minimum level of service is maintained following the privatisation of London Underground; [18647]

(4) by what means *(a)* the continuation of through ticketing, *(b)* freedom of interchange between lines and *(c)* the current concessionary fares arrangements will be specifically safeguarded in legislation introduced to privatise London Underground; [18627]

(5) what proposals he has to limit fare increases on London Underground in year five after privatisation; [18626]

(6) by what means he will ensure the continuation of the London travelcard following the privatisation of London Underground. [18628]

Mr. Bowis: The Secretary of State has given clear commitments in all these policy areas—*Official Report*, columns 149–65. We shall now develop the precise mechanisms for delivering them, which in almost all of these cases will depend on the structural option that we choose. Further details will be included in the White Paper that we aim to publish in the summer.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list those companies invited to tender for the provision of advice for the sale of London Underground, indicating which were successful; [18649]

(2) on what date his Department began the process of appointing advisers for the process of the sale of London Underground; [18648]

(3) what budget he has allocated for the provision of advice and consultancy fees for the sale of London Underground. [18650]

Mr. Bowis: We have not yet appointed any advisers on the privatisation of London Underground, nor have any potential advisers yet been invited to tender. We shall be starting the process of appointing advisers shortly. No estimates have yet been made about the cost of advisers.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the investment backlog of the London Underground. [18659]

Mr. Bowis: London Transport estimates the size of the investment backlog to be around £1.2 billion.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total income received by London Underground for advertising in each of the last five years. [18622]

Mr. Bowis: London Underground has provided the information requested which is set out in the following table.

Year	*Advertising income £ million*
1996–97	[1]15.5
1995–96	12.8
1994–95	15.1
1993–94	18.1
1992–93	18.0

[1] Current forecast.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the amount of surplus available for other transport investment following the sale of London Underground. [18661]

Mr. Bowis: We believe that there should be sufficient proceeds from the privatisation of London Underground to fund not only the modernisation of the underground's infrastructure but additional transport investment. The amounts involved will depend on the structural option chosen for privatisation and the level of demand from the private sector.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the income received from the marketing of products bearing the London Underground logo for each of the last five years. [18620]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not readily available.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the income received by London Underground from the lease of its properties in each of the last five years; and if he will list the income he expects for each of the next five years. [18619]

Mr. Bowis: London Underground has provided the following figures showing income from property leasing since 1992–93. It has not been able to provide forecasts for income expected in the next five years from this source.

Year	*Income from property leasing £ million*
1992–93	20.6
1993–94	20.4
1994–95	22.3
1995–96	24.7
1996–97[1]	24.8

[1] Current forecast.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) of 25 February, *Official Report*, column 164, if he will make a statement on the treatment of future public and private investment in London Underground Ltd. in respect of limits on public borrowing set out in the convergence criteria in the Maastricht treaty. [18354]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 3 March 1997]:* The general government financial deficit is the measure used in the Maastricht criteria. The general government sector excludes public corporations, such as London Underground. Net borrowing by a publicly owned London Underground would however score against London Transport's external finance limit and against the public sector borrowing requirement.

Air Traffic Control (Scotland)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the new Scottish air traffic control centre to be fully operational. [18618]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 25 February 1997, *Official Report* column *141*, to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell).

London Transport Museum

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the income of the London transport museum for each of the last five years. [18621]

Mr. Bowis: The income generated by the London transport museum, excluding Government grant, is as follows:

1991–91: £1,201,000
1992–93: £1,429,000
1993–94: £1,172,000
1994–95: £2,043,000
1995–96: £1,977,000

London Buses (Subsidy)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the level of subsidy paid by London Underground Ltd. to London Buses Ltd. in each of the last five years. [18623]

Mr. Bowis: The distribution of resources by London Transport to its businesses is an operational matter for LT. The cash it allocated to London Buses activities in each of the last five years is shown in the table.

Year	*Cash paid (£ million outturn prices)*[1]
1991–92	157
1992–93	174
1993–94	78
1994–95	43
1995–96	44

[1] Figures supplied by London Transport.

Taxi Licences (North Lincolnshire)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has approved the request from North Lincolnshire district council to allow it to implement a policy of vehicle age limits when licensing taxis in the former Glanford borough area. [18592]

Mr. Bowis: The council does not require the consent of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to implement such a policy. My right hon. Friend has consulted on a proposal to make an order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 which would prohibit the imposition of age limits on taxis and private hire vehicles; the responses are being considered.

Rail Tickets

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *69*, if he will list the consultants commissioned to test the capabilities of station ticket offices, indicating the cost of employing them. [18656]

Mr. Watts: Following a competitive tendering exercise in 1995, the Rail Regulator commissioned Steer Davies Gleave to verify the capabilities of station ticket offices. The cost involved is commercially confidential.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *69*, if he will list the market research organisation commissioned to survey rail ticket outlets. [18655]

Mr. Watts: Following a competitive tendering exercise in autumn 1996, the Rail Regulator commissioned NOP Mystery Shopping to survey rail ticket outlets.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *69*, if he will list the stations included in the Rail Regulator's survey of ticket outlets. [18657]

Mr. Watts: No. The Rail Regulator's survey is a Mystery Shopping exercise. It would be inappropriate to identify the stations involved.

Channel Tunnel Fire

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *70*, on what basis he believes it could be prejudicial to release information on the channel tunnel fire. [18654]

Mr. Watts: The investigations into the causes and consequences of the channel tunnel fire are continuing to examine evidence and establish the facts relating to the incident. Until the results of these investigations are known it could be misleading to release partial information.

London and Continental Railways

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total amount paid by London and Continental Railways to Her Majesty's Government for its acquisitions during the privatisation of the railways. [18640]

Mr. Watts: Nil. London and Continental Railways—LCR—was appointed in February 1996 to design, building and operate the channel tunnel rail link as part of the private finance initiative. An explanatory memorandum describing the Government's agreements with LCR was deposited in the House Library in March 1996.

Research Site, Crowthorne

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the sale of the Department's former research site at Crowthorne. [18901]

Mr. Bowis: My Department has exchanged contracts with Legal and General Assurance Society Ltd. to dispose of the research site at Crowthorne, to take effect from 25 March. The price is £18.2 million with a clawback provision on the undeveloped part of the site. The disposal represents a good deal for the taxpayer and the local community at Crowthorne which will have the benefit of a respected financial institution as the new landlord. The Transport Research Laboratory has a long lease for most of the site which has 14 years to run. TRL will be able to continue its excellent research, for which it is world famous.

Train Track Fences

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) who is responsible for the maintenance of fences alongside railway lines; [18240]

(2) what are the regulations governing the height and strength of fences alongside railway lines; and if these differ between built-up and rural areas. [18241]

Mr. Watts: Responsibility for maintaining railway fencing rests the infrastructure controller, Railtrack, in the case of the main network.

The controller's general duties under sections 3 and 4 of the Health and Safety at Work Act, etc. 1974, to protect the public from its premises and activities, extend to taking reasonably practicable measures to prevent unauthorised access. This obligation will be made explicit in the Railway Safety (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 1977 which come into force in early May. The new regulations will replace an existing fencing requirement in section 10 of the Railway Regulation Act 1842.

Guidance published by the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate gives detailed advice on standards of railway fencing distinguishing between built-up and rural areas.

En Route Centre (Swanwick)

Sir David Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the purpose of his Department's press briefing to be held at the new en route centre at Swanwick on 6 March; how many previous press briefings at Swanwick have taken place in the last 24 months; by whom they were organised; who attended; and if he will make a statement. [18290]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 3 March 1997]:* The press briefing at Swanwick on 6 March is not being held or organised by the Department of Transport. It has been arranged by the Civil Aviation Authority's corporate communications department—CCD.

The purpose is to demonstrate the systems integration achieved to date, prior to the commencement of air traffic controller training at the centre in the near future.

I understand that this is the first major press briefing to be held at the Swanwick centre in the past 24 months although numerous individual journalists have made visits during that period. All these visits have been co-ordinated by the CAA's corporate communications department.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much her Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency associated with her Department. [16965]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Employment Service is the executive agency associated with the Department for Education and Employment. The Teachers Pensions Agency was an agency until it was contractorised in October 1996. The cost of setting up these agencies can be calculated only at disproportionate cost and would, in any case, be marginal when set against their overall budgets.

Both the Employment Service and the Teachers Pensions Agency carried out broadly the same functions before they become agencies. Therefore, although no actual figures are available, the cost of setting up these agencies is likely to have been marginal. The benefits in

setting up these organisations as agencies can be seen in their clearer roles and responsibilities and in the freedom to meet targets they are set by Ministers and the successful performance against those targets.

General Schools Budget

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), of 10 February, *Official Report*, columns *54–55*, (i) what factors underlie the variations in the amounts of money in the general schools budget which are not delegated to schools; [18407]

(2) what assessment she has made of the reasonableness of the amounts of money in the general schools budget which *(a)* Buckinghamshire and *(b)* Lancashire chooses not to delegate to schools. [18408]

Mr. Robin Squire: Within the general schools budget, funding is retained centrally by local education authorities for a wide variety of purposes, of which the most significant include capital expenditure; programmes supported by grants for education support and training and other specific grants; home-to-school transport, school meals, and various aspects of special educational needs. A number of these items are generally acknowledged to be particularly difficult to delegate, and in certain cases, known as "mandatory exceptions", delegation is currently forbidden by law.

There may therefore be many reasons why one LEA delegates a higher percentage of its GSB. In the case of the two LEAs referred to in the hon. Member's second question, the most significant factor would appear to be Buckinghamshire's proportionately higher provision for capital expenditure, which is a "mandatory exception".

Post-16 Pupils

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the educational institutions in Kirklees that provide post-16 places; and how many post-16 pupils attended each in the most recent year for which figures are available. [18410]

Mr. Paice: The following table shows the educational institutions in Kirklees that provide post-16 places and how many post-16 pupils attended each one on the latest date for which figures are available.

School (January 1996)	*16+ pupils*
All Saints RC High School	107
Batley Boys High School	117
Colne Valley High School	124
Heckmondwike (GM) Grammar School	150
Honley High School and Sixth Form Centre	145
Howden Clough High School	208
Mirfield Free Grammar School	190
St. John Fisher RC High School	129
Shelley High School	332
Whitcliffe Mount High School	175

College of further education (June 1996)	*Full-time students*	*Part-time students*
Dewsbury College	1,800	3,900
Greenhead College	1,265	—
Huddersfield New College	1,058	—
Huddersfield Technical College	3,400	7,400

Mrs. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what representations she has received from the Audit Commission about the provision of post-16 places in Kirklees; [18413]

(2) what advice he has received from the Audit Commission about the number of educational institutions for post-16 pupils. [18414]

Mr. Paice: None.

Mrs. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many surplus post-16 school places there were in Kirkless in the latest year for which figures are available; [18415]

(2) what is the cost of maintaining surplus places for post-16 pupils in Kirklees; and what is the cost per surplus place. [18416]

Mr. Paice: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mrs. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will list the educational institutions within five miles of Castle Hall grant-maintained school that provide post-16 places; [18411]

(2) if she will list the educational institutions in Kirklees available for year 11 pupils leaving Castle Hall grant-maintained school in the summer of 1997 to attend. [18412]

Mr. Paice: The following educational institutions, all within five miles, are available in Kirklees for year 11 pupils leaving Castle Hall GM school in the summer of 1997 to attend:

Colleges of further education

Dewsbury College

Greenhead College

Huddersfield New College

Huddersfield Technical College

Schools

All Saints RC (VA) High School

Batley High School for Boys

Batley Grammar (independent mixed selective) School

Colne Valley High School

Heckmondwike GM Grammar (selective) School

Honley High School and College

Howden Clough (Girls) High School

Mirfield Free Grammar School and Sixth Form Centre

St. John Fisher RC (SA) High School

Shelley High (VC) School

Whitcliffe Mount High School

The following schools providing post 16 places are also within five miles of Castle Hall GM School:

Calderdale LEA

Brighouse GM High

The Brooksbank GM

Hipperholme and Lightcliffe GM High

Rastrick GM High

Wakefield LEA

Ossett School

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of *(a)* 16, *(b)* 17 and *(c)* 18-year-olds are in full-time education in each local authority area. [18610]

Mr. Paice: This information is published for 16 and 17-year-olds in the Department's "Statistical Bulletin 8/96: Participation in education of young people aged 16 and 17 in each local education authority and region of England, 1990–91 to 1994–95". Information on 18-year-olds could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students residing in Lancashire receive their education under the assisted places scheme in schools *(a)* located in each of the district council areas of Lancashire and *(b)* in other local education authority areas; and if she will list those areas. [18387]

Mrs. Gillan: Information about the district council area or the local education authority area from which assisted pupils originate is not collected centrally.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many successful applicants there were under the assisted places scheme in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire indicating the total value of the payments made in the last three years for which figures are available. [18642]

Mrs. Gillan: No schools in the Crewe and Nantwich constituency were successful in joining the assisted places scheme. Abbey Gate college, Chester and the Grange school, Northwich joined the scheme in September 1996 and Beech Hall preparatory school, Macclesfield has been successful in its bid for participation from September 1997. Four other schools in Cheshire—King's school, Chester; King's school, Macclesfield; Mount Carmel school; and Queen's school, Chester—were already participating before 1996.

The total amount spent on the scheme at the existing four participating schools in Cheshire in the academic years 1993–94 to 1995–96, the latest year for which information is complete, is given in the following table:

Assisted places scheme: Cheshire schools

Academic Year	*1993–94*		*1994–95*		*1995–96*	
	Pupils	*£000s*	*Pupils*	*£000s*	*Pupils*	*£000s*
King's School, Chester	95	220	89	212	87	234
King's School, Macclesfield	173	553	179	619	193	670
Mount Carmel School	25	74	30	94	35	109
Queen's School, Chester	63	135	58	136	58	152
Total		972		1,061		1,165

Information is not collected centrally on the place of residence of assisted pupils. Participating schools generally draw from a wide catchment area.

First Aid (Schools)

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what requirements there are for the teaching of first aid in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools; and what data she collates on the numbers of schoolchildren achieving first aid qualifications. [18393]

Mrs. Gillan: There is no specific requirement on schools to teach first aid. However, all maintained schools are required under section 351 of the Education Act 1996 to deliver a curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society; and prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. This can include teaching about first aid.

The Department does not collate information centrally on the numbers of schoolchildren achieving first aid qualifications.

Teacher Training

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the number of students who, on completion of a postgraduate certificate of education or equivalent qualification, will gain qualified teacher status in *(a)* mathematics and *(b)* physics, for each of the years 1997 to 2000. [18248]

Mr. Forth: The information is given in the following table. Estimates for undergraduate completers are based on students who entered such courses between 1993–94 and 1996–97, assuming a four-year course length. Estimates of postgraduate completers in 1997 are based on actual entrants in 1996–97, and for later years on the anticipated intakes for postgraduate courses, assuming that intake targets are met. Estimates for completers reflect the average in-course wastage by type of course; 25 per cent. in the case of undergraduate and 11 per cent. for postgraduate courses.

Year	*Maths completers*	*Science completers*
1996–97	1,550	2,600
1997–98	1,900	2,850
1998–99	1,650	2,600
1999–2000	1,600	2,650

Figures shown to nearest 50.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps her Department is taking to encourage new entrants into the teaching profession in *(a)* mathematics and *(b)* physics. [18249]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for promoting teaching as a profession rests with the Teacher Training Agency. I will ask the chairman of the gency, Geoffrey Parker, to write to the hon. Member direct.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the training of teachers in *(a)* mathematics and *(b)* physics. [18250]

Mr. Forth: From this September, there will be a national training curriculum for initial teacher training in primary mathematics. A curriculum for secondary mathematics and science and primary science will be introduced next September.

In addition, the Teacher Training Agency is developing national standards for classroom teachers, subject leaders and head teachers. The national standards will provide a focus for teachers' continuing professional development, whatever subject they teach. It is for schools and teachers to decide what individual training needs are appropriate.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions she has had with universities and their representatives over changes in the number of university physics courses; and what assessment she has made of the impact of those changes on the number training to be physics teachers. [18252]

Mr. Forth: None. My right hon. Friend continues to attach importance to the supply of places in science and engineering, but it is for individual universities to decide which courses to offer in the light of demand from suitably qualified applicants and other factors. The latest available information from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service suggests that the number of applicants for higher education physics courses has risen compared with this time last year. The number of students commencing initial teacher training courses in science, including physics, has increased significantly since 1990.

Enborne Lodge School, Newbury

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment under what statutory authority orders have been made prohibiting *(a)* the proposed closure and *(b)* the sale of Enborne Lodge school in Newbury. [18583]

Mrs. Gillan: There are no orders that prohibit either the sale or the closure of Enborne Lodge school. The school was transferred by the Education (Inner London Education Authority) (Property Transfer) Order 1990 to Lambeth local education authority subject to a condition that should the authority cease to use it wholly or mainly for its education functions or should it wish to sell the school it must first offer it to all other inner-London councils for transfer at nil consideration. Statutory proposals to close the school were published on 4 February 1997 and are currently under consideration.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to whom the proceeds of the sale of Enborne Lodge school in Newbury would be payable. [18584]

Mrs. Gillan: Enborne Lodge is currently subject to conditions in the Education (Inner London Education Authority) (Property Transfer) Order 1990 which specify that proceeds of sale would be divided among the inner-London councils.

Education Reform Act 1988

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on proposals *(a)* to amend the Education Reform Act 1988 and *(b)* to issue new orders under the Act. [18585]

Mrs. Gillan: The Education Act 1996, which is a consolidated Act, made amendments to and superseded most of the Education Reform Act 1988. The Education Bill, which was introduced in the House on 30 October 1996, proposes amending section 218 of the ERA, which concerns the employment of teachers and others in positions involving regular contact with young people under the age of 19.

Part III of the ERA confers a number of order-making powers on the Secretary of State. The Government have recently consulted about proposals to exercise those powers in order to relax conditions on certain former Inner London education authority properties which were transferred to the inner-London boroughs.

Schools (Cheshire)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is the average class size for *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools for (i) the constituency of Crewe and Nantwich and (ii) Cheshire; [18641]

(2) how many schools in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire have an average class size over 30. [18643]

Mr. Robin Squire: Average class sizes of classes as taught by one teacher in Cheshire local education authority area in January 1996 were 27.4 for primary schools and 21.3 for secondary schools; 53 primary schools and no secondary schools had average class sizes over 30.

Information on average class sizes in schools in the constituency of Crewe and Nantwich is not collated centrally.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was spent by each training and enterprise council on (i) administration, (ii) youth training, (iii) training for work and (iv) other areas in 1995–96. [18710]

Mr. Paice: Information on training and enterprise council spend for administration is published by each TEC in its annual statutory accounts, a copy of which is placed in the Library. Information on TEC expenditure on youth training, training for work and other areas is stated in an annual amalgamated income and expenditure account for all TECs, which will be published shortly.

Long-term Unemployment

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she is planning to introduce to reduce long-term unemployment. [16086]

Mr. Forth: Long-term unemployment has fallen by 36 per cent. over the last three years. We are continuing to build on the success of our economic and labour market policies by introducing this year a new package of measures to help people unemployed for two years or more.

From February project work will be extended to help up to 100,000 people. The new pilots will include an emphasis on identifying and tackling basic skills problems which might be preventing some individuals from returning to work. In addition, a new contract for work pilot initiative will explore ways in which the talents of the private sector might be used to help more very long-term unemployed people back to work. From April, under a new jobfinder programme, people reaching two or more years' unemployment will benefit from an intensive series of one-to-one interviews with an Employment Service adviser which will focus on helping the individual jobseeker back to work. We will also be making the jobmatch programme—which helps people to leave unemployment for a part-time job—available nationally to those aged under 25 who have been unemployed for two years or more; and within the existing training for work programme, there will be new opportunities for long-term unemployed people whose job prospects can best be increased through training designed to improve their basic skills.

Home-school Agreements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research her Department has undertaken with regard to the best way of implementing home-school agreements; and if she will make a statement. [16932]

Mr. Forth: The Department has not commissioned research in this area beyond that referred to in the reply given to my hon. Friend on 29 January by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), *Official Report*, column 256. A good deal of work has however previously been undertaken on home-school agreements. This includes the two-year project "Home-School Contract of Partnership" carried out jointly by the Royal Society of Arts and the National Association of Head Teachers.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to reduce discrimination against potential employees on the grounds of age. [16084]

Mrs. Gillan: The Government are fully aware of the problem of age discrimination against older employees. That is why this Department promotes the Government's campaign for older workers which persuades employers to recruit, train, and retain them on merit, disregarding age.

Science, Technology and Mathematics Council

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the work of the Science, Technology and Mathematics Council; and if she will make a statement on the future of the council. [18356]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 3 March 1997]:* Since it was set up in 1994, the Science, Technology and Mathematics Council has successfully undertaken a range of development activities in support of national vocational education and training policies including national vocational qualifications and Scottish vocational qualifications.

I understand that the council intends to bid for national training organisation status later this year. Bids for recognition will be judged by an independent recognition panel chaired by Gordon Beaumont, against national criteria. The future of the Science, Technology and Mathematics Council as an NTO is, therefore, dependent upon its ability to meet the recognition criteria.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the definition of fuel poverty. [15238]

Mr. Roger Evans: The term fuel poverty has no precise meaning and is not adopted by the Department.

Extra help has been made available through the benefit scale rates and premiums—which includes help with payment of VAT on fuel—and is worth around £1.4 billion a year to low-income families with children and £1.1 billion a year to poorer pensioners. Cold weather payments, which provide help to those most in need during periods of exceptional cold weather, the home energy efficiency scheme and the direct payments scheme, which plays an important role in protecting benefit recipients who might otherwise be at risk of having fuel or water supply disconnected, are further examples of our commitment to helping the most vulnerable.

Fuel bills have fallen by more than 1 per cent. in real terms over the last two years, while the main income-related benefit rates have continued to be increased in line with inflation.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency set up by his Department since the start of April 1992. [16971]

Mr. Burt: The Department of Social Security has set up two agencies since April 1992. The total cost of setting up the Child Support Agency was approximately £146 million which includes the cost of the work transferred from the Benefits Agency, the costs of computers, accommodation, recruitment and training of staff in the administration of new legislation.

The cost of setting up the War Pensions Agency was approximately £1 million as it retained an existing organisation and staff together with the same framework of legislation.

Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances, in answering questions to Ministers regarding appeal tribunals, it is his policy to *(a)* provide the information requested, *(b)* inform the questioner that the president of the independent tribunal service will write to him and *(c)* inform the hon. Member that it is a matter for the independent tribunal service; and in what respects the policy changed between 23 January and 17 February. [17402]

Mr. Roger Evans: Responsibility for the judicial functions and administration of appeal tribunals is vested by statute in the president of the independent tribunal service.

Where the information requested by an hon. Member lies wholly within the responsibilities of the independent tribunal service, Ministers may decide either to obtain the information from the independent tribunal service in order to reply to the hon. Member, or suggest that the hon. Member deal directly with the independent tribunal service. As the hon. Member's recent questions related to matters within the responsibility of the independent tribunal service, I judged it more appropriate to direct the hon. Member to the service for the information requested.

Questions on the Government's policy in relation to appeal tribunals will, of course, continue to be answered by Ministers.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what methodology is to be adopted by his Department to ensure that contractorisation of the services provided to the Benefits Agency delivers *(a)* value for money and *(b)* quality standards for the full term of the contract. [17621]

Mr. Roger Evans: The methods and procedures used on all contracts for services awarded by this Department take account of prescribed policies, EU legislation and best practice.

The key criterion used in selecting contractors is that the chosen bid must demonstrate itself to be the most economically advantageous. Formal evaluation procedures, pertinent to each specific project, are put in place to ensure this is achieved.

The necessary quality standards are part of a contractor's contractual obligation. The actual performance achieved is measured against the requirements throughout the contract to ensure compliance.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersen, *(c)* BMI, *(d)* Capita and *(e)* Sema since 1992 and the broad function to be carried out by the contractor, and the value of the contract in each case. [17614]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 18 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *752–53*.

Pensioners

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of pensioners aged *(a)* 75 years and over, *(b)* 80 years and over and *(c)* 85 years and over received income support for the latest year for which figures are available. [17485]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Proportion of pensioners in the population of Great Britain receiving income support: (February 1996)

Age of pensioner	*Percentage of population*
75 years and over	24.6
80 years and over	30.9
85 years and over	35.9

Notes:

1. Sample size 5 per cent.
2. Percentages are based on the age of the income support claimant as a proportion of all pensioners in the specified age group.
3. There will be an overlap in the numbers of recipients accounted for in each banding as a recipient may appear in more than one group ie. an 80 year old recipient will be represented in both the 75 years and over and the 80 years and over groups.

Source:

1. Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry February 1996.
2. Office for National Statistics mid-term estimates of the population 1995.

Social Fund

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of the social fund was spent on administration costs in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [17732]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table. Information for 1995–96 will be published in the Social Security departmental report later this month.

Year	*Administration cost (£ million)*	*Percentage of total gross expenditure*	*Percentage of total gross[1] expenditure plus recoveries*
1992–93	208	51.9	35.3
1993–94	[2]270	61.1	41.4
1994–95	209	46.3	30.5

[1] The social fund recycles loan repayments to help more people. Since the start of the scheme loans valued at over £1.9 billion have been made for an outlay of £384 million—a multiplier effect of some 5 times.

[2] The high administration cost for 1993–94 was largely due to expenditure on the new social fund computer system.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the budget of the social fund for the financial year 1997–98. [18237]

Mr. Evans: Details of the discretionary social fund budget for 1997–98 will be announced later this month.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the budget of the social fund in each of the last five years. [18238]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table:

£ million

Year	*Grants budget*	*Gross loans budget*[1]	*In-year allocation (loans)*	*Total gross loans budget*
1992–93	91	211	15	225
1993–94	95	251	0	251
1994–95	97	255	15	270
1995–96	97	309	0	309
1996–97	97	322.5	21	343.5

[1] Includes contingency reserve.

Income Support

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to end the classification of taxed inheritance as capital in assessing income support entitlement. [17746]

Mr. Roger Evans: There are no plans to do so.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will amend the rules for the disqualification of income support entitlement for families from a capital sum for each partner to an aggregate sum for both partners. [17747]

Mr. Evans: The income support rules already provide that the capital resources of partners are aggregated when assessing entitlement to benefit. The exception is where one partner is permanently in a residential care or nursing home. In such cases, each partner is assessed separately and their capital resources are not aggregated. We have no plans to amend these rules.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates he has made of the current cost of funding the jobseeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement. [17731]

Mr. Roger Evans: The estimated programme cost of jobseeker's allowance in 1996–97 is £5,681 million.

The departmental report for 1997–98, which is due to be published later this month, will contain new estimates of the cost of jobseeker's allowance.

Source: Table 1A, Departmental report 1996–97.

Pensions (Winter Supplement)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had with the British pensioners and the trade unions action association regarding the introduction of a supplement to the basic pension during the winter months; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on this matter. [18251]

Mr. Heald: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no discussions with either group.

We have no plans to introduce a supplement to the contributory retirement pension during the winter months. Cold weather payments from the social fund give extra help towards additional heating costs resulting from a sustained period of very cold weather. People in receipt of income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance who have a pensioner premium are eligible. So far this winter, over 5 million payments worth over £43 million have been issued to almost 3 million eligible people.

Young Benefit Claimants (Crewe and Nantwich)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the current number of under 25-year-olds claiming benefits in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire. [18644]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Disability Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many medical members of disability appeal tribunals are involved in examining claimants for the purpose of the all-work test. [11087]

Mr. Roger Evans *[pursuant to his reply, 23 January 1997, c. 719]:* A comparison of Benefits Agency medical services and independent tribunal service records indicates that 88 doctors who perform work for Benefits Agency medical services on a fee-paid sessional basis involving incapacity benefit are also members of disability appeal tribunals.

Sources:

Independent Tribunal Service.

Benefits Agency Medical Services.

Note:

Data are provisional and subject to change.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances medical members of disability appeal tribunals are involved in examining claimants for the purpose of the all-work test. [13327]

Mr. Evans *[pursuant to his reply, 30 January 1997, c. 362-63]:* Medical members of disability appeal tribunals may be involved in examing claimants for the purposes of the all-work test if they are qualified and contracted to do so by Benefits Agency medical services on whose behalf such examinations are carried out.

Sources:
Independent Tribunal Service. Benefits Agency Medical Services.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* medical members of disability appeal tribunals and *(b)* doctors appointed to sit as medical assessors in appeals involving the all work test are employed by the Benefits Agency; and in what capacity. [11086]

Mr. Evans *[pursuant to the reply, 27 January, 1997c. 107]:* No doctor who is currently employed by the Benefits Agency medical services, in a salaried capacity, may be appointed as a medical member of a disability appeal tribunal or as a medical assessor.

A comparison of Benefits Agency medical services and independent tribunal service records indicates that 241 doctors who perform work for Benefits Agency medical services on a fee-paid sessional basis are also members of disability appeal tribunals. These doctors do not sit as a members of the tribunals which are considering cases in which they have been involved in connection with their work for Benefits Agency medical services.

Information on the number of doctors who perform work for Benefits Agency medical services on a fee-paid sessional basis who also act as medical assessors to Social Security Appeals tribunals is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, a doctor who performs work for Benefits Agency medical services on a fee-paid sessional basis which involves incapacity benefit is not eligible for appointment as a medical assessor. On appointment as a medical assessor, it is emphasised that an individual cannot undertake sessional work for Benefits Agency medical services in connection with incapacity benefit because of the possible conflict of interest.

Sources:
Independant Tribunal Service. Benefits Agency Medical Services.
Note
Data are provisional and subject to change.

HEALTH

EU Anti-smoking Campaign

Mr. Lamont: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been Her Majesty's Government's policy towards proposals for an EU anti-smoking campaign; and what is the current status of these proposals. [18088]

Mr. Horam: The Government acknowledge the European Commission's work in putting together a paper on the present and proposed future Community role in combating tobacco consumption.

However, we consider that tobacco control measures are primarily a matter for individual member states, taking account of their differing social and economic contexts.

Fibromyalgia

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into fibromyalgia; what treatment is available for it under the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [18100]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health has not commissioned or evaluated any research into fibromyalgia. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC is an independent body deciding what research to support on its own expert judgment. The council is always willing to consider soundly based scientific proposals in competition with other applications.

Decisions about the treatment of individual patients with fibromyalgia are the responsibility of the doctors concerned who are required to exercise their clinical judgment, in consultation with their patients, informed by the patient's medical history.

The organisation of health services and the manner in which they are delivered are matters for health authorities in their role as purchasers of services for their populations. They enter into arrangements with hospital and community units—trusts—to ensure that the entire range of services is available, taking account of the needs of the local population and the priorities set for the use of the available resources.

Human Growth Hormone

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost to his Department to date of the litigation in respect of human growth hormone. [18086]

Mr. Horam: The legal costs to date are estimated at £500,000. In addition, numerous staff at various levels and for various periods of time have been involved in matters related to the litigation and their costs cannot be separately identified.

Dental Laboratories

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's policy in respect of third-party accreditation of dental laboratories. [18465]

Mr. Malone: The Government support the principles of third-party accreditation of dental laboratories, highlighted in their response to the fourth report from the Health Select Committee, Session 1992–93.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures his Department has taken to control the levels of laboratory prices charged by dentists; [18446]

(2) what measures he has taken to ensure the laboratory expense element of dentists' NHS work is properly accounted for; [18466]

(3) what role his Department has, and what consultations it has had, in determining how and where the annual expenditure on laboratory treatment is spent. [18447]

Mr. Malone: None. Dentists are paid a fee for each item of service which covers both remuneration and the expenses met by a dentist in providing treatment. These expenses include any laboratory expenses. Dentists decide for themselves which laboratories they use and they then make entirely private transactions with those laboratories. The control of the level of laboratory prices is, therefore, a matter for individual dentists.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons statistics are not available on the *(a)* levels of dental laboratory work and *(b)* cost of dental laboratory items. [18444]

Mr. Malone: These statistics are not collected centrally. They are a matter for laboratories and their customers.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department has taken to safeguard the quality of dental appliances for which dentists are paid a fixed fee; and if he will issue guidelines containing indicative costs for laboratory work. [18443]

Mr. Malone: National health service dentists are required by law to employ a proper degree of skill and attention and to use only materials which are suitable for the purposes for which they are used. The work of dentists is monitored by the dental reference service. There are no plans to issue guidelines containing indicative costs of laboratory work.

Vitamin B6

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment will make a further statement about the safety of vitamin B6 supplements. [18384]

Mr. Horam: The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment has yet to complete its further consideration of the safety of vitamin B6.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what scientific studies of vitamin B6 the secretariat of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment based its assertions, in respect of *(a)* peripheral neuropathy in humans at 50 mg and above over a prolonged period and *(b)* corroborating evidence from reports of animal toxicity. [18383]

Mr. Horam: The secretariat of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment reflects the views of the committee. As concerns a list of the scientific studies first considered by the committee, I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food gave him on 21 January 1997, columns *548–49*. A list of the additional studies being considered by the Committee will be placed in the Library shortly.

Dental Services

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons dentists are not required to provide patients with an itemised invoice for all dental work. [18445]

Mr. Malone: For most courses of dental treatment, including those involving laboratory work, dentists are required, under their terms of service, to provide treatment plans for patients, detailing the treatment they require and the likely cost. Dentists are also required by regulations to issue a receipt for the amount of the national health service charge the patients have paid.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons he rejected the Health Committee's recommendations in its fourth report of Session 1992–93 on dental services (HC264) that laboratory fees should be ring-fenced. [18493]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 47 of the Government response to the fourth report from the Health Select Committee, Session 1992–93, published in August 1993 as Cm 2308.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will now hold a public inquiry in respect of patients treated with pituitary-derived human growth hormone who have contracted Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. [18944]

Mr. Horam: I regret if I inadvertently misled the House on 24 February 1997 at column *128* in saying that the judge, Mr. Justice Morland, had actually said that the hearing was in inquisitorial examination rather than an adversarial one. He did, however, say that the Department had

"given full discovery so far as logistically possible and have not withheld any witnesses who could have given worthwhile evidence."

In practice, therefore, the court case was very much like a public inquiry, and I am not convinced that another public examination of these issues would add anything further.

Needless to say, in what is undoubtedly a tragic situation, the Department is committed to settling compensation for those who will receive it as soon as possible, as well as offering counselling and support, and financing research into the causes and nature of this condition.

Community Care (Suffolk)

Mr. Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people Suffolk county council had placed under community care in its own residential homes at the most recent date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [18292]

Mr. Burns: At 31 March 1996, Suffolk county council was supporting a total of 1,059 adult and elderly residents in its own residential homes.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost to Suffolk county council per week of a community care place in a residential home run *(a)* by the county council and *(b)* by the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [18293]

Mr. Burns: As published in "Key Indicators of local authority social services 1996", copies of which are available in the Library, the latest available figures, for 1994–95, show gross expenditure per week by Suffolk county council on residential care per supported resident in staffed homes for older people was £268 for local authority homes and £178 for independent sector homes.

Prescriptions

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances patients are entitled to an NHS prescription from a private consultation; and what contractual limitations health authorities may place on general practitioners in respect of such prescriptions. [18360]

Mr. Malone: Doctors who are consulted in a private capacity may not provide national health service prescriptions.

Rabies

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what data he has collated on the number of British subjects who have contracted rabies in the past five years; and where it was contracted in each case. [18363]

Mr. Horam: The public health laboratory service collates information on human rabies cases imported into the United Kingdom. It has had no reports of clinically diagnosed rabies in British subjects in the last five years.

NHS Trusts (Funding)

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS trusts which will receive funds from the public capital budget to support their proposed private finance initiative projects, indicating for each the amount that will be paid in each year of these arrangements. [18482]

Mr. Horam: The following 14 trusts have been offered funds from the support scheme:

Bishop Auckland Hospitals NHS Trust
Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust
Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust
Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust
Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust
Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust
Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust
North Durham Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Oxleas NHS Trust
St. James and Seacroft University Hospitals NHS Trust
Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust
Walsgrave Hospitals NHS Trust
Wellhouse NHS Trust
Worcester Royal Infirmary NHS Trust

The trusts are still negotiating with their private sector partners to finalise these projects. Therefore the amount of support being offered to each trust is commercial in confidence. However, the total cost of the support scheme is not expected to exceed £9 million a year, less than 1 per cent. of the total NHS capital budget.

Waiting Lists (Cheshire)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the current number of patients on waiting lists for each of the hospitals in Cheshire. [18646]

Mr. Horam: Information on the numbers of patients waiting for admission to each of the trusts in Cheshire is given in the table.

Provisional number of patients on waiting lists on 31 December 1996

	Number
Warrington Hospital National Health Service Trust	5,979
Halton General Hospital NHS Trust	1,857
West Cheshire NHS Trust	105
East Cheshire NHS Trust	1,528
Mid-Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust	6,577
Countess of Chester Hospital Trust	6,425

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the current average waiting times for operations for each of the hospitals in Cheshire. [18645]

Mr. Horam: Information in the form requested is not available centrally.

Blood Products (Recalls)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions in the last 12 months blood plasma and other blood products have been recalled from hospitals by the blood transfusion service; in how many cases the cause for recall was possible contamination; and in how many cases batches of products later recalled had begun to be used by hospitals. [17535]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 25 February 1997]:* The National Blood Authority, of which the former blood transfusion service forms a part, has made two such recalls in the last 12 months after the products had been issued to hospitals and had begun to be used by them. The products in question were assessed as safe for use because of the production processes to which they were subjected. The recalls were undertaken as a precautionary measure only, in order to avoid unnecessary public concern.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BSE

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the extent of farmers concealing incidents of BSE infection; and if he will make a statement. [18147]

Mrs. Browning: There is no evidence to suggest that farmers are concealing BSE suspect cases. The temptation to do so would be greatest on holdings where no previous BSE case had occurred, as it is these farmers who might expect to have the most to lose by reporting a case. Statistical data give no indication that this is happening. In Great Britain in 1995, 1,351 cases were reported on holdings with no previous BSE case; in 1996, 789 cases were reported; and as at 28 February 1997, 72 cases had been reported. This is in line with the overall year-on-year decline in the epidemic as a result of controls on animal feed.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many new cases of BSE infection have been reported in each of the last 48 months categorised by area; and if he will make a statement. [18148]

Mrs. Browning: Details of confirmed cases of BSE by date of restriction for the last 48 months categorised by county are being placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of concealment over BSE infection *(a)* are currently under investigation and *(b)* have been reported in each of the past two years; of those investigated, how many and what percentage have resulted in (i) prosecution and (ii) conviction; and if he will make a statement. [18146]

Mrs. Browning: None.

Mr. Temple-Morris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the Government's current estimate of the additional public expenditure attributable to BSE in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what estimate he has made of the amount of this expenditure which will be reimbursed from the European Union's budget. [18432]

Mrs. Browning: Details of BSE-related expenditure and receipts for the years in question are as follows:

£ million

	1996–97	*1997–98*
Estimated expenditure	1,370	1,010
Estimated recoveries from EU	340	590

Cod (North Sea)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the decline in cod stocks in the North sea; and by what percentage total stocks have declined over the last 12 years. [18017]

Mr. Baldry: The advisory committee on fishery management of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea has estimated that the spawning stock biomass of North sea cod declined by 16 per cent. over the period 1985 to 1996 inclusive. The total allowable catch set for 1997 by the Fisheries Council in December 1996 reflected concern about the pressure on this important stock and provides for the spawning stock biomass to increase by 38 per cent. over the period 1996 to 1998.

Cloning

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will establish a review of the ethical issues relating to the cloning of animals and birds threatened with extinction. [18390]

Mrs. Browning: The breakthrough in cloning technology has the potential to be used to save animal and bird species threatened with extinction, but it has yet to be shown to be possible in species other than the sheep. A review of the ethics of the application of this technique to threatened species would be premature.

Bullfinches

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance his Department issues to fruit growers regarding the prevention of damage caused by bullfinches. [18365]

Mrs. Browning: Advice to fruit growers regarding the prevention of damage caused by bullfinches is provided, on request, by ADAS (Statutory), the Ministry's wildlife adviser. The basis of the advice is that, wherever possible, non-lethal means of preventing any damage, for example the use of netting or fine threads spread over trees, should be used. Advice on longer-term measures, such as future planting strategies to reduce the risk of damage, would also be available.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many individual licences have been issued by his Department for the killing or taking or bullfinches since the restriction on general licences to the county of Kent; and how many bullfinches have been killed or trapped during that period. [18364]

Mrs. Browning: One individual licence has been issued since the restriction on the general licence to kill or take bullfinches to the county of Kent came into effect on 1 November 1996. The licensee is not required to submit details of the number of bullfinches killed or taken until after the licence has expired. As the licence is still in force, this information is not yet available.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what data he has collated on the damage to fruit orchards by bullfinches; how those data were gathered; and how often the situation is reviewed. [18366]

Mrs. Browning: Past evidence and the best advice currently available to the Ministry are that bullfinches can cause serious damage to fruit orchards; this can happen very quickly and is often unpredictable. The Ministry's experience in dealing with problems caused by bullfinches has shown that whole trees can be affected, resulting in total crop losses. The situation is kept under continual renewal.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many bullfinches have been killed or taken under general licences issued by his Department in each of the past five years; [18367]

(2) what data he has collated on the number of bullfinches killed or taken under general licence in Kent in each of the past five years. [18368]

Mrs. Browning: The information requested is set out below.

Number of bullfinches killed or taken

Year	*Within all areas in England covered by the general licence, including Kent*	*Within the County of Kent*
1991–92	433	341
1992–93	620	567
1993–94	326	312
1994–95	262	262
1995–96	317	317

Swine Fever

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of classical swine fever were recorded in the United Kingdom in each year, from 1992 to 1996; and how much compensation was paid to the owner of those animals in each year. [18359]

Mrs. Browning: None.

Rabies

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what data he has collated relating to rabies in those parts of Europe where it is a serious hazard. [18362]

Mrs. Browning: Those data are available from a quarterly report entitled "Rabies Bulletin Europe", which is compiled and published by the World Health Organisation collaborating centre for rabies surveillance and research in Tübingen, Germany.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Housing Executive

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of Housing Executive properties *(a)* demolished and *(b)* replaced in each local authority catchment area since 1992. [17744]

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I am advised that the information, for the period 1 April 1992 to 25 February 1997, is as follows:

District council area	*Demolitions*	*Completions*
Belfast	2,921	790
Antrim	111	0
Ballycastle	23	23
Ballymena	90	9
Ballymoney	39	0
Carrickfergus	105	38
Coleraine	72	0
Larne	59	27
Newtownabbey	446	26
Armagh	8	4
Banbridge	34	0
Newry and Mourne	10	21
Craigavon	194	65
Castlereagh	41	0
Down	54	13
Lisburn	36	1
Newtownards	127	116
North Down	0	0
Cookstown	2	0
Dungannon	66	0
Fermanagh	38	6
Limavady	0	0
Derry	127	100
Magherafelt	1	0
Omagh	16	5
Strabane	20	6

Housing Executive

Mr. Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met members of the Northern Ireland Housing Council to discuss the budget of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. [17742]

Mr. Moss: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has not met the members of the Northern Ireland Housing Council, but I met them on 4 April 1996 at which time we discussed several matters including the allocation of resources for 1996–97 for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and housing associations.

Mr. Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many submissions he has received *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* opposed to, his proposals to subject Northern Ireland Housing Executive functions to compulsory competitive tendering; and if he will make a statement. [17745]

Mr. Moss: Over 130 copies of the proposal for the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order, which included provisions subjecting the Northern Ireland Housing Executive functions to compulsory competitive tendering, were issued on 19 January 1996. Thirty-four submissions were received, of which two were in favour of, and eight were opposed to, the proposals to subject Northern Ireland Housing Executive functions to compulsory competitive tendering.

Water Service Staff

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many posts within the Water Service were transferred to Craigavon from (i) Newry, (ii) Armagh, (iii) Belfast and (iv) elsewhere, in each of the past five years; [17803]

(2) how many people are employed in design in the Water Services in (i) Craigavon, (ii) Armagh and (iii) Newry; and what proposals there are for future staffing levels in those offices; [17807]

(3) how many posts within the Water Service were transferred to Belfast from (i) Newry, (ii) Armagh, (iii) Craigavon and (iv) elsewhere, in each of the past five years; [17805]

(4) how many employees there were in Water Service in (i) Armagh, (ii) Craigavon and (iii) Newry and Mourne in each of the past five years; [17804]

(5) what were the *(a)* numbers and *(b)* grades of recruits to the Water Service in (i) administration, (ii) personnel, (iii) design, (iv) accountancy and (v) other disciplines, in each of the past five years, indicating the location of each post; [17808]

(6) what are the projected staffing levels in the water service in (i) Armagh, (ii) Craigavon, (iii) Newry and (iv) Belfast, for the next three years. [17806]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Water Service under its chief executive, Mr. H. R. F. Plester. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from H. R. F. Plester to Mr. Seamus Mallon, dated 28 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your six Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about Water Service operational matters. I shall answer each in turn in the order in which they were tabled. The general background is that staffing levels in the Water Service have reduced from 2529 in 1992 to 2298 at the end of 1996.

No 386

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many posts within Water Service were transferred to Craigavon from (i) Newry, (ii) Armagh, (iii) Belfast and (iv) elsewhere, in each of the past five years.

The information requested is shown in the table.

	Newry	*Armagh*	*Belfast*	*Elsewhere*
1992	0	0	10	0
1993	0	0	0	0
1994	0	0	0	0
1995	0	0	0	0
1996	9	4	0	0

No 387

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many people are employed in design in the Water Services in (i) Craigavon, (ii) Armagh and (iii) Newry, and what proposals there are for future staffing levels in those offices.

Twenty-seven people based in Craigavon are employed in design which is taken to include construction supervision and direct administrative support. Overall design manning in the Water Service is being reduced so that engineering staff can be redeployed to enable the filling of key vacancies directly related to the provision of customer services. One option under consideration would involve a reduction of about ten staff in the Craigavon design section (together with slightly greater numbers in Belfast). Water Service is currently considering this and alternative options in line with business needs, the expressed wishes of staff and their career development, together with any possible differential impact in relation to Equal Opportunities taking full account of Government's commitments to TSN and PAFT concerning possible disparity of effect in community or sectional terms. You will be aware that Water Service Design Group does not provide direct services to the public. All staff under consideration are in mobile grades available for posting throughout Northern Ireland. Water Service has, at present, no staff involved in design permanently based in either Armagh or Newry and no change in this situation is envisaged.

No 389

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many posts within the Water Services were transferred to Belfast from (i) Newry, (ii) Armagh, (iii) Craigavon and (iv) elsewhere, in each of the past five years.

No Water Service posts were transferred to Belfast during the past five years with the exception of five posts transferred from Craigavon in 1995.

No 392

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many employees there were in Water Services in (i) Armagh, (ii) Craigavon and (iii) Newry and Mourne in each of the past five years.

The information requested is shown in the table.

	Armagh	*Craigavon*	*Newry and Mourne*
1992	71	219	104
1993	65	230	101
1994	64	222	97
1995	62	207	96
1996	53	221	89

No 393

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what were the (a) numbers and (b) grades of recruits to the Water Services in (i) administration, (ii) personnel, (iii) design, (iv) accountancy and (v) other disciplines, in each of the past five years, indicating the location of each post.

Recruitment of staff is to the Department of the Environment (NI); numbers, grades and initial location of recruits whose first posting was to Water Service are shown in the table.

General Service Grades (includes administration and personnel)

Number	*Grade*	*Location*
1992		
2	Administrative Assistant	Belfast
1	Administrative Officer	Belfast
1	Typist	Belfast
1993		
3	Administrative Assistant	Belfast
1	Administrative Trainee	Belfast
1	Administrative Assistant	Cookstown
1	Administrative Officer	Belfast
1	Typist	Belfast
1994		
0		
1995		
2	Administrative Assistant	Belfast
1	Typist	Belfast
1996		
1	Administrative Assistant	Belfast
1	Administrative Officer	Belfast
1	Management Trainee	Belfast

Design

Number	*Grade*	*Location*
1992		
5	Professional and Technology Officer	Belfast
3	Graduate Trainee Engineer	Belfast
7	'O' level Trainee Engineer	Belfast
1	'O' level Trainee Engineer	Craigavon
1	'O' level Trainee Engineer	Londonderry
1993		
2	Graduate Trainee Engineer	Belfast
3	'O' level Trainee Engineer	Belfast
1	'O' level Trainee Engineer	Ballymena
2	'O' level Trainee Engineer	Craigavon
1994		
0		
1995		
0		

Design

Number	Grade	Location
1996		
4	Graduate Trainee Engineer	Belfast
1	Graduate Trainee Engineer	Craigavon
5	'O' level Trainee Engineer	Belfast
1	'O' level Trainee Engineer	Londonderry
1	'O' level Trainee Engineer	Ballymena
1	'O' level Trainee Engineer	Craigavon

Accountants

Number	Grade	Location
1992		
0		
1993		
0		
1994		
1	Grade 5 Director of Finance	Belfast
3	Grade 7 Accountant	Belfast
1995		
0		
1996		
1	Staff Officer Accountant	Belfast

Other disciplines (includes main operational functions)

Number	Grade	Location
1992		
2	Professional and Technology Officer	Belfast
1	Professional and Technology Officer	Londonderry
1	Professional and Technology Officer	Craigavon
1	Professional and Technology Officer	Omagh
2	SG2 Water Sampler	Belfast
2	SG2 Water Sampler	Craigavon
1	Scientific Officer	Belfast
2	Industrial Operative	Londonderry
2	Industrial Operative	Antrim
2	Industrial Operative	Ballymena
2	Industrial Operative	Larne
1	Electrician	Belfast
1	Industrial Operative	Downpatrick
12	Industrial Operative	Belfast
10	Industrial Operative	Craigavon
5	Industrial Operative	Newry
2	Industrial Operative	Armagh
1993		
1	Professional and Technology Officer	Belfast
1	Professional and Technology Officer	Londonderry
1	Professional and Technology Officer	Antrim
2	Professional and Technology Officer	Craigavon
1	SG2 Water Sampler	Belfast
3	SG2 Water Sampler	Ballymena
1	Ship's Mate	Belfast
2	Assistant Scientific Officer	Belfast
1	Industrial Operative	Magherafelt
1	Industrial Operative	Enniskillen
2	Industrial Operative	Ballymena

Other disciplines (includes main operational functions)

Number	Grade	Location
1	Industrial Operative	Coleraine
1	Electrician	Belfast
2	Industrial Operative	Downpatrick
6	Industrial Operative	Conlig
10	Industrial Operative	Belfast
2	Industrial Operative	Armagh
1	Industrial Operative	Newry
9	Industrial Operative	Craigavon
1994		
2	SG2 Water Sampler	Belfast
1	SG2 Water Sampler	Ballymena
1	Industrial Operative	Magherafelt
1	Industrial Operative	Omagh
1	Industrial Operative	Londonderry
1	Industrial Operative	Antrim
1	Industrial Operative	Ballymena
1	Industrial Operative	Coleraine
5	Industrial Operative	Belfast
1	Industrial Operative	Lisburn
4	Industrial Operative	Conlig
1	Fitter	Belfast
4	Industrial Operative	Craigavon
6	Industrial Operative	Armagh
1995		
1	SG2 Water Sampler	Ballymena
1	SG2 Water Sampler	Craigavon
4	Industrial Operative	Londonderry
1	Industrial Operative	Omagh
1	Industrial Operative	Antrim
4	Industrial Operative	Ballymena
1	Industrial Operative	Larne
18	Industrial Operative	Belfast
4	Industrial Operative	Lisburn
9	Industrial Operative	Conlig
3	Industrial Operative	Downpatrick
1	Able Bodied Seaman	Belfast
2	Fitter	Belfast
4	Industrial Operative	Craigavon
3	Industrial Operative	Newry
3	Industrial Operative	Armagh
1996		
1	Gr 6 Mechanical and Electrical Eng	Belfast
2	Industrial Operative	Londonderry
3	Industrial Operative	Ballymena
8	Industrial Operative	Belfast
2	Industrial Operative	Lisburn
1	Industrial Operative	Conlig
2	Industrial Operative	Downpatrick
2	Electrician	Belfast
2	Fitter	Belfast
2	Industrial Operative	Craigavon

No 396

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what are the projected staffing levels in Water Services in (i) Armagh, (ii) Craigavon, (iii) Newry and (iv) Belfast, for the next three years.

Water Service staffing levels currently under review include scientific services, design services and administrative support for operational services. The outcome of these reviews will not be known for some months. It is not, therefore, possible to provide the detailed information requested for these locations at this time. When concluded the outcome of these reviews will, however, if significant changes are involved, be communicated to elected representatives. Staffing matters are regularly the subject of trade union consultation

Housing Council

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to extend the responsibilities of the Northern Ireland Housing Council. [17741]

Mr. Moss: None.

Housing

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many units of housing were completed by *(a)* housing associations and *(b)* the Housing Executive in Northern Ireland during 1995–96; and what is the total number of applicants on housing waiting lists. [17743]

Mr. Moss: The information is as follows:

	Number
Registering housing associations	1,276
Housing executive	1,362
Waiting lists as at 31 March 1996	
Urgent	11,148
General	12,201
Total	23,349

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each council area the total (i) dwellings, (ii) Housing Executive dwellings, (iii) housing association dwellings, (iv) privately owned rented dwellings and (v) owner-occupied dwellings; and if he will list each category as a percentage of the total number of dwellings in each council area. [18511]

Mr. Moss: The most recent information in the form requested is set out in table A3.21 of the Northern Ireland house condition survey 1991, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library. Similar information from the Northern Ireland house condition survey 1996 is expected to be published later this year. Between surveys, the information requested is not available at district council level.

Housing Benefit and Rate Rebate

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each council area the number and percentage of (i) all occupants, (ii) occupants of (1) Housing Executive properties and (2) housing association properties and (iii) owner-occupiers who receive *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* rate rebate, and what are the total sums for each category in each area. [18510]

Mr. Moss: The information is not available in the form requested; however, information which is available as at 1 February 1997 is as follows:

	Number	*Percentage*	*Expenditure (1 April 1996 to 1 February 1997)*
Total households in Northern Ireland	518,841	—	—
Total Housing Executive properties	139,447	—	—
Tenants receiving Housing benefit	109,026	78	168,864,324
Private Sector tenants (including housing association tenants)	34,045	—	68,626,495
Owner-occupiers receiving housing benefit	43,905	—	10,200,000

Major Road Works Programme

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in respect of the major road works programme in each of the last five years and the current year the sums set out in each relevant edition of the Northern Ireland expenditure plans and priorities for that programme. [18591]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. W. J. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from W. J. McCoubrey to Mr. William Ross, dated 3 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your recently tabled PQ about planned expenditure on the major road works programme.

The table below details planned expenditure on major roads schemes as incorporated in the Government's Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities.

Planned expenditure on major works (Schemes costing £200,000 and over)

Year	*£000s*
1991–92	18,730
1992–93	18,426
1993–94	22,747
1994–95	22,309
1995–96	16,723
1996–97	14,384

Figures for 1991–92 to 1995–96 extracted from NI Estimates. Figure for 1996–97 included in new format of NI Estimates.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the PFI contracts signed to date, indicating the total value of such contracts, the cost per year in annual payments and the total value of the payments to be made over the life of the contracts. [18617]

Sir John Wheeler: Projects approved under the private finance initiative to date include a contract energy services scheme at Holywell hospital, car parking facilities at the Royal group of hospitals, and leasing of medical and other equipment. The car parking project at the Royal group of hospitals is a financially free-standing

project which will recover its costs through charges to the user. The total capital value of signed contracts amounts to approximately £5.3 million, with an annual payment of £1 million. The total value of the payments to be made over the life of the contracts amounts to approximately £5.7 million.

SCOTLAND

Voluntary Sector Projects

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to prevent closure of voluntary sector projects which would formerly have been eligible for a three-year extension subject to positive evaluation. [18173]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Under "Programme for Partnership", it is for local partnerships to make decisions on the extension of voluntary sector projects funded through the urban programme.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much of the urban programme underspend he will use to fund voluntary sector projects for one more year, in areas that were not awarded priority partnership area or regulation programme status. [18174]

Mr. Robertson: There is no reason to expect an urban programme underspend in 1996–97.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet representatives of the Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector to discuss the use of urban programme underspend to avoid imminent closure of voluntary sector projects. [18175]

Mr. Robertson: I met representatives of the Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector on 24 January 1997 to discuss its concerns about voluntary sector projects. I have already agreed to a further meeting with it on Friday 4 April 1997.

Research Grants

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total amount of Government research grants allocated in each of the past five years to each Scottish university in (i) pharmacology, (ii) bio-physics, (iii) food hygiene and (iv) information technology. [17288]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 26 February 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her yesterday by my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology at the Department of Trade and Industry.

Farmed Salmon

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what tests are currently carried out on farmed Scottish salmon for traces of ivermectin; and what proportion of fish revealed traces in the most recent tests. [17830]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* The Veterinary Medicines Directorate undertakes surveillance for the presence of residues of veterinary medicines in fish as part of a programme to monitor whether residues of these substances are passing into food for human consumption in unacceptable concentrations. In the case of salmon, samples of farmed salmon, including Scottish salmon, are purchased from randomly selected retail outlets throughout the United Kingdom. The 1996 programme of analyses has yet to be completed and reported, but the most recent data show that no residues of ivermectin were determined in any of the 275 samples of salmon analysed to date.

Further Education

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to include an assessment of *(a)* the quality of the services and *(b)* other factors in the future determination of grants for further education colleges; and if he will make a statement. [17998]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* The White Paper "Raising the Standard", Cm 3542, published in January 1997 set out our plans to consult colleges on introducing, from 1997–98, a direct link between quality and funding. That, and other factors, will be considered in the review of the further education funding formula I have announced will take place.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to provide additional funding to the further education sector to allow for the introduction of new initiatives; and if he will make a statement. [17999]

Mr. Robertson *[holding answer 29 February 1997]:* The White Paper "Raising the Standard", Cm 3542, published in January 1997 set out our plans to launch a challenge fund to improve the use of new technology by colleges. The sum of £1.3 million will be made available for this in 1997–98.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to review the funding formula for the further education sector; and if he will make a statement. [18000]

Mr. Robertson *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* I announced on 3 February 1997 that a review of the funding formula for the further education sector would be initiated. Work on that will commence shortly, and will involve representatives of the sector.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has had with the further education sector in respect of its concerns about the current funding formula; and if he will make a statement. [18001]

Mr. Robertson *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* I met representatives of the Association of Scottish Colleges on 27 January 1997 for a discussion on further education funding. I assured them that college views will be considered as part of the forthcoming review of the funding formula.

Pupils (Standard Grades)

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many 16-year-olds gained five standard grades in each year since 1991. [18420]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 3 March 1997]:* Standard grade statistics are collected for S4 pupils and not for 16-year-old pupils. Most S4 pupils, however, have attained their 16th birthday, or will shortly do so. The number of pupils who gained five or more standard grades is listed. Statistics for those who gained standard grades at levels 1 to 3 are available from 1991. Information on pupils who gained five or more standard grades at levels 4 to 7 is, however, available only from 1993.

	Level 1–3	*Level 4–7*	*Level 1–7*
1991	25,357	—	—
1992	27,527	—	—
1993	28,478	22,868	51,346
1994	30,655	23,423	54,078
1995	33,553	23,623	54,078
1996	34,884	24,091	58,975

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Brewing Industry

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on recent rulings by the Office of Fair Trading in respect of *(a)* the tied house in relation to brewers and *(b)* the Courage Inntrepreneur scheme. [18462]

Mr. John M. Taylor: *(a)* The Officer of Fair Trading held an inquiry into brewers' wholesale pricing policy in 1995. The inquiry concluded that, although a minority of tied tenants on long leases had experienced some hardship, the differential wholesale pricing policy of brewers had not in general placed the tied trade at a disadvantage to free houses. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade accepted this conclusion.

(b) The Office of Fair Trading recommended that the undertakings given by Inntrepreneur following the merger between Courage and Grand Metropolitan in 1991 be varied. This variation released Inntrepreneur from its previous undertakings, but introduced a new undertaking which prevented Inntrepreneur from requiring any of its tenants to take beer supplies exclusively from Scottish and Newcastle, which owns the Courage beer brands. The Director General of Fair Trading argued that, as the nature and size of Inntrepreneur were similar to that of a number of other pub chain operators, it was no longer appropriate to keep the existing undertakings in place. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade accepted this recommendation.

Oil (Control and Jurisdiction)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the European Union has any entitlement to exercise control or jurisdiction over the organisation of oil development and exploration and the disposal of the oil from United Kingdom waters; and if he will make a statement. [18586]

Mr. Page: The exploration for and development of the UK's oil and gas resources continue to be carried out under licences issued by the UK Government. The UK's licensing regime is required to conform with the provisions of the hydrocarbons licensing directive of 1994, which sets out common rules relating to the procedures for granting authorisations for the exploration and production of oil and gas. However, that directive also reaffirms the important principle that

"Member States have sovereignty and sovereign rights over hydrocarbon resources on their territories".

Structural Funds Programmes

Mr. Faber: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the negotiation of the 1997 to 1999 British objective 2 structural funds programmes. [18863]

Mr. Greg Knight: The Government in collaboration with local partnerships produced regional and social conversion plans for each of the 13 British areas. These were submitted to the European Commission during August 1996.

Following negotiations, the Commission has announced its agreement in principle to 10 programmes of grant, based on these plans, subject to consultation of the EU structural funds committees. Some questions raised by the Commission remain to be settled; I hope that this can be done as soon as possible so that the programmes can be adopted by the Commission by the end of March.

The 10 programmes cover:

North-east England

West Cumbria

Yorkshire and Humberside

London

West Midlands

Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Cheshire

South Wales

Eastern Scotland

Western Scotland

Gibraltar

The remaining programmes for the east midlands, Thanet and Plymouth are close to agreement and should be adopted during April.

The programmes set a coherent strategic framework for the use of approximately £1.9 billion of EU structural funds grant for economic regeneration, the development of enterprise and skills, and the creation of jobs based on the local needs and the potential of each area. They draw on the experience and successes of the 1994 to 1996 programmes to ensure continuity and improved value for money.

Under the programmes, a range of projects will be approved, for the support for small and medium enterprises, increasing the technology base, tourism and community economic development, with an anticipated total value of around £4.7 billion.

I welcome the effective way in which the Government and local partnerships have co-operated on these programmes. Over the past few years, the experience of local programme monitoring committees has grown. Increasingly, they address strategic issues, as well as the more working level consideration of programme implementation. Although these committees essentially deal with administrative matters and are mainly attended by officials, we have received representations from some

committees seeking to involve local councillors. After considering these representations, I have decided that it should be for each United Kingdom monitoring committee to determine whether to accept elected members as representatives of local councils.

Most of the programmes for England and Wales provide for part of their grant, £160 million in total, to be awarded to projects through the second round of regional challenge. This will be run locally, and after the programmes have been adopted, each area will launch its own competition.

Regional challenge aims to increase competition in the allocation of European structural funds. The first round awarded a total prize fund of £160 million to 34 innovative projects in England and Wales. Winning applicants included flagship projects such as the earth centre in South Yorkshire and the Lowry centre in Salford. The first round of regional challenge projects has levered in an estimated £359 million of private sector contribution.

Films (Copyright)

Mr. Faber: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what form notifications should take for the purpose of regulation 33(b) of the Copyright and Related Rights Regulations 1996 (SI, 1996, No. 2967) when authors or performers wish to exercise their right to equitable remuneration for rental of films made under agreements concluded before 1 July 1994. [18864]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Directive 92/100 EEC, which these regulations implement, does not specify how such notification are to be made and nor, therefore, can the regulations do so. It would nevertheless appear that any form of notifications that clearly indicates an intent to exercise the right to equitable remuneration would be valid for the purposes of regulation 33. Such notifications may be given on behalf of the persons to whom they relate by those representing them, such as professional agents or advisers or organisations such as Equity. It would also appear that notifications need not list individually the performers or films to which they relate to be valid. Ultimately, however, these are matters for the courts to determine.

DEFENCE

Pipeline Inspection Notification

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what conclusions were reached following the trial of published avoidances around the United Kingdom ethylene pipeline, promulgated by aeronautical information circular No. 73/1994; [17993]

(2) how many aircraft proximity incidents between helicopters whose activities were notified under the pipeline inspection notification system and military aircraft have been reported since the introduction of the system; and if he will list the date and risk category of each incident; [17994]

(3) if he will list the changes made to the pipeline inspection notification system since its introduction, including the date on which each change was introduced; [17984]

(4) what plans he has for further changes to the pipeline inspection notification system. [17983]

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Ion Exchange Resin

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress being made in developing a treatment process for ion exchange resin arising from the MODIX process at Rosyth and Devonport. [18221]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Ships Support Agency. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Roger Babington to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 4 March 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the progress on the treatment of ion exchange resin arising from the MODIX process at Rosyth and Devonport, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Ships Support Agency.

The resin generated as a result of the MODIX process can be categorised into two groups; resin containing chelates (chemicals which affect the rate at which the radioactivity within the resin may leach out) and resin without chelates. The resin without chelates, categorised as low level waste, is sent to BNF Plc Drigg for disposal. The resin without chelates, categorised as intermediate level waste, is stored safely until it has decayed to low level waste, when it too can be disposed of at BNF Plc Drigg. The resin containing chelates is cleaned by a process called MODULOX (trade name for Modular Oxidisation) which removes the chelates so the waste can be disposed of at BNF Plc Drigg once classified as low level waste.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress being made to construct building D151 at Devonport to store arisings of ion exchange resin. [18218]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Ships Support Agency. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Roger Babington to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 4 March 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the progress being made to construct building D151 at Devonport to store the arisings of ion exchange resin, as this mater falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Ships Support Agency.

The construction work on the building which will accommodate arisings from the ion exchange resin is progressing to programme, under project D151, for handover to Devonport Management Limited early in 1998.

Radium Experiments (Alverstoke)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what data his Department has collated concerning radium experiments on humans at Alverstoke. [18098]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library.

Air Traffic Control

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect on operational

effectiveness of moving from a system of military air traffic control to utilising the system of civilian air traffic control. [18260]

Mr. Soames: The RAF has carried out a thorough assessment, involving practical simulations and managerial studies, of delivering a military air traffic control service using the equipment and associated software designed to be provided for the new en route centre at Swanwick. The assessment determined that the same degree of service in terms of quality and safety could be provided to military aircraft without any loss of operational freedom.

Gulf War (Organophosphate Pesticides)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* specific corrections to each of the previously inaccurate replies relating to the use of organophosphate pesticides during the Gulf war. [18342]

Mr. Soames: I apologised to the House on 10 December last year for the fact that earlier parliamentary questions on this subject had been answered incorrectly. Full details of what is now known about the use of organophosphate pesticides by British service personnel during the Gulf war are contained in the organophosphate pesticide investigation team report which was published on 10 December 1996. A copy of this report was also placed in the Library.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost to his Department of aid to the Russian Federation to assist the safe transport and storage of nuclear weapons for each of the last five financial years; and from which subheads of which votes these funds were taken. [18278]

Mr. Soames: UK assistance to the Russian Federation in the context of safe transport and storage of nuclear weapons has comprised two related projects: the supply of heavy duty trucks and the supply of supercontainers. The total costs by year for each of the last five years for these two projects are as follows:

£ million

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Vehicles	1.171	11.358	9.447	2.049	1.653
Containers	0.000	2.75	8.65	0.03	0.007

These costs are charged to Vote 2. Further breakdown by subhead is not held centrally and is not available.

RAF Greenham Common (Radioactive Contamination)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the recent report by the geosciences advisory unit of Southampton oceanography centre relating to alleged radioactive contamination around RAF Greenham Common base. [18340]

Mr. Soames: As this report was issued only very recently, it has not yet been possible to assess in detail all the information it contains. We are, however, pleased to note that the conclusions of this independent study broadly substantiate the findings of the National Radiological Protection Board report which was published in December last year. The results relating to the Greenham Common and Newbury areas must be particularly reassuring to local residents and provide further confirmation that there was no truth in last year's irresponsible allegations of a nuclear weapon accident.

The tentative evidence regarding man-made radioactivity in the immediate environment of AWE Aldermaston must be compared with the extensive environmental survey data held at AWE and published annually before any proposals for yet further work can be considered.

British Military Personnel (Rwanda)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training assistance British military personnel have provided in Rwanda over the past five years. [18474]

Mr. Soames: No training assistance has been provided by British military personnel in Rwanda over the past five years. A member of the Royal Army Medical Corps has, however, provided assistance in 1995 to the independent international commission of inquiry set up at the request of the Government of Rwanda to investigate events surrounding deaths of an unknown number of persons at the Kibeho refugee camp. In addition, a member of the RAF legal services led a seminar sponsored by the UN centre for human rights in February on training the Rwandan army in the human rights aspects of military activity.

European Directives

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work has been carried out or commissioned by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Adjutant General to assess the impact on the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force of (i) the working time directive, (ii) the posting of workers directive, (iii) the parental and family leave directive, (iv) the young workers directive, (v) the burden of proof directive and (vi) the data protection directive. [18369]

Mr. Soames: The Ministry of Defence takes its full part in government consideration of EU legislation. All relevant directives are examined within MOD to assess the potential impact on the armed forces, and the appropriate service authorities contribute fully to the debate. Any proposed EU directives which might affect service personnel policy are routinely referred to the Army's Adjutant General and to his counterparts in the other two services for their views. The parental and family leave directive and the burden of proof directive do not

apply to the UK since they are being made under the agreement on social policy. The posting of workers directive does not apply to the armed forces. The working time directive, the young workers directive and the data protection directive are all currently under active consideration within the Department.

HMS Monmouth (Lynx Helicopter)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the loss of the Lynx helicopter from HMS Monmouth off Plymouth on 25 February; and what the helicopter will cost to replace. [18424]

Mr. Soames: HMS Monmouth was exercising in the channel south of the Eddystone light on 25 February, in heavy seas, when the lashing securing her Lynx helicopter to the flight deck broke, causing the aircraft to topple overboard following a sequence of heavy rolls by the ship. The crew of the helicopter, who were aboard the aircraft at the time, were recovered shaken but uninjured. The Royal Navy has begun an inquiry into the incident.

It is intended to salvage the aircraft so that the extent of the damage to it, and the possibility of returning it to service, can be assessed. HMS Monmouth is currently being provided with a replacement Lynx from within the existing aircraft fleet. It is too early to say what further action, if any, will be required to replace the damaged aircraft, or what the costs would be.

New Building (Abbey Wood, Bristol)

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, (1) pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *32*, if the new claim for additional payments and extensions for time submitted by the shell and core contractor for his Department's new building at Abbey Wood, Bristol, incorporates the claims referred to in his answer of 24 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *39*; [18502]

(2) what claims for compensation have been made on the basis of the accuracy of the specifications in his Department's documentation for its new building at Abbey Wood, Bristol; [18503]

(3) on how many occasions the shell and core contractor for his Department's new building at Abbey Wood, Bristol, was prevented from progressing because of delays by the client team in approving design change. [18504]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The new claim submitted for additional payment and extensions of time has subsumed that previously submitted by the Abbey Wood shell and core contractor.

Common Security and Defence Policy

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the agreement made between France and Germany at Nuremburg in December 1996 on common security and defence and the relevance of this agreement to NATO obligations. [18587]

Mr. Soames: The agreement is a matter for the French and German Governments, but we note its reaffirmation of the importance of NATO to Europe's stability and security, and its signatories' commitment to strengthen their contribution to the alliance.

German Military Forces

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement describing the current restrictions on the participation of German military forces outside their own borders in consequence of post-war agreements. [18588]

Mr. Soames: Germany is not bound by any post-war treaty in this respect. The basic law lays down that the German armed forces may be used only for defensive purposes. The federal court ruled in July 1994 that this provision was no bar to the deployment of German forces outside Germany. The court did, however, require that any such deployment be approved by the Bundestag in each case. German forces are now deployed to Bosnia as part of NATO's security force.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military sites in the United Kingdom have nuclear waste storage facilities; and what is the total amount of radioactive waste in storage at the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy and *(c)* Royal Air Force sites. [15999]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* MOD stores radioactive waste in numerous locations throughout the United Kingdom. Details, including predicted future arisings, from the 10 major MOD sites in the United Kingdom, either storing or producing radioactive waste, were published by Nirex in "The 1994 United Kingdom Waste Inventory", a copy of which has been sent to the Library. Other minor items of radioactive waste are stored at various locations prior to disposal; however, it would involve disproportionate cost to provide details of these.

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16785]

Mr. Soames: A list of the number of written and oral parliamentary questions answered by Ministers in my Department in the Sessions 1982–83 to 1995–96, supplied by the parliamentary on-line information service unit, has been placed in the Library. Figures for the earlier years requested are not available.

The other information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Deaths

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of each armed service have *(a)* been killed on active service, *(b)* been killed in accidents, *(c)* committed suicide and *(d)* died of natural causes in each of the last seven years. [17819]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 4 March 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of personnel serving in the Armed Forces who have died since 1990 as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Defence Analytical Services Agency.

The information you request is detailed in the attached tables. I have listed deaths according to our standard classification system which I hope you will find useful as it gives slightly greater detail than requested in your question. You will also note that as well as giving figures for the last seven years I have included the position for the first three months of this year.

The number of deaths in the armed forces from 1 January 1990 to 3 March 1997 (based on information reported to DASA as at 3 March 1997)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997 to 3 March 1997	Total
Tri-service									
Active service	10	38	5	7	8	0	3	0	71
Assault	2	4	2	0	5	4	0	0	17
Coroner verdicts of suicide	42	34	30	23	29	18	5	0	181
Other self inflicted[1]	4	7	6	10	2	23	17	0	69
Accidents	159	141	124	129	107	101	75	4	840
Natural causes	103	86	100	72	68	61	40	3	533
Details of causes not yet available	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	1	9
Total	320	310	267	241	219	207	148	8	1,720
Navy									
Active service	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Assault	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	3
Coroner verdicts of suicide	8	5	6	1	6	1	2	0	29
Other self inflicted[1]	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	5
Accidents	22	26	21	34	11	16	13	1	144
Natural causes	19	19	21	9	18	12	8	1	107
Details of causes not yet available	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Total	50	53	48	44	37	31	27	2	292

Note:

[1] This covers cases with open or misadventure coroner verdicts and those yet to be confirmed.

The number of deaths in the armed forces from 1 January 1990 to 3 March 1997 (based on information reported to DASA as at 3 March 1997)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997 to 3 March 1997	Total
Army[1]									
Active service	10	33	5	7	7	0	3	0	65
Assault	2	3	2	0	4	3	0	0	14
Coroner verdicts of suicide	20	22	19	18	18	15	3	0	115
Other self inflicted[2]	3	4	4	4	1	17	13	0	46
Accidents	92	91	75	65	71	55	46	1	496
Natural causes	48	39	50	39	29	24	17	0	246
Details of causes not yet available	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	5
Total	175	192	155	133	130	114	87	1	987
RAF									
Active service	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Assault	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coroner verdicts of suicide	14	7	5	4	5	2	0	0	37
Other self inflicted[2]	0	1	2	6	1	5	3	0	18
Accidents	45	24	28	30	25	30	16	2	200
Natural causes	36	28	29	24	21	25	15	2	180
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	95	65	64	64	52	62	34	5	441

Notes:

[1] Includes Gurkhas.

[2] This covers cases with open or misadventure coroner verdicts and those yet to be confirmed.

UN Service Medal (Korea)

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons stocks of the United Nations service medal with clasp "Korea" are exhausted; and when further medals will be made available. [17752]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* It is normal procedure that claims for the United Nations service medal with clasp "Korea" are passed to the appropriate single service medal office where eligibility may be confirmed following a check of service records. Until recently, stocks were held at the Army medal office. Those stocks were depleted in August 1995 and a request for additional medals was sent to UN headquarters, New York. In late 1996 the UN secretariat informed the United Kingdom mission to the UN that it did not intend to issue any more "Korea" medals, as its stocks were exhausted and no funds were available to purchase more.

Since then, the UN has granted permission to the British Government to purchase and issue the medal. Arrangements to identify a suitable source of supply are in hand. Following the necessary procurement action, eligible claimants will be issued with their medal.

Some 180 eligible British veterans of the Korean war are awaiting their UN medal at this time.

Royal Naval College, Greenwich

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the estimated costs of the conversion of the Royal Naval college at Greenwich to accommodate the joint service command and staff college *(a)* as set out in the consultation document published by his Department in January 1995 and *(b)* as subsequently revised, in each case taken over a 25-year period at net present value. [18471]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 3 March 1997]:* The 1995 consultative document considered two Greenwich-based options, the difference lying in the number of students on the advanced course. The most relevant of these is the option with 312 students on the advanced course, which had a 25-year net present value of £256 million at September 1993 prices. As the Greenwich option was effectively ruled out at this point, for a variety of reasons including the fact that its costs were 25 per cent. higher than the then preferred Camberley option, no revised costs have been produced. Uplifting the figure by standard defence indices gives an NPV of approximately £290 million at April 1997 prices. Broadly comparable NPV figures for the recently announced preferred Serco/Laing proposal, albeit over a 30-year period and with an advanced course of 327 students, are around £195 million.

ENVIRONMENT

City Challenge

12. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for redeveloping Stockton high street under the city challenge initiative. [17013]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: As my hon. Friend is aware, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport issued our decisions on the planning and associated transport matters relating to Stockton town centre development on 20 February. Those decisions should effectively allow city challenge to proceed with its redevelopment plans.

Recycling Facility (Warndon)

16. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about *(a)* planning permission for and *(b)* the licensing of the proposed chemical transfer and oil recycling facility at Warndon, Worcester. [17017]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received some 210 representations on these issues. These are in addition to the petition from the residents of Worcestershire which the hon. Gentleman submitted to the House on 26 November 1996 and on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State submitted observations on 22 January 1997.

Local Government Finance

17. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the level of local government funding. [17018]

Mr. Curry: The level of local government funding is set at a level which allows efficient local authorities to provide a full range of services, and is in line with overall Government policy on public spending.

19. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes he plans to make to the formulae for the standard spending assessment. [17020]

Sir Paul Beresford: None, at present. We shall consider the formulae for 1998–99 later in the year.

Global Warming

18. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representation he has received relating to the impact of Government policies on global warming. [17019]

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Member will be as pleased as I am at the successful outcome of Sunday and Monday's Environment Council. The UK played a central part in that success and we are determined to ensure that the world signs up in Kyoto to substantial reductions in polluting gases.

Litter

20. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to discourage litter. [17021]

Mr. Clappison: The Tidy Britain Group, which is largely funded by my Department, acts as the national litter abatement agency. The group promotes a wide range of campaigns to discourage litter and we have highlighted its role in the Department's current national publicity campaign "Helping your Environment".

Earth Summit

21. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports the Government will submit to the UN special session in New York in June to review progress on implementing the decisions of the Rio de Janeiro Earth summit. [17022]

Mr. Gummer: A report setting out the United Kingdom's overall progress in implementing Agenda 21 will be presented to the special session. The report will also set out some of the Government's objectives for future action towards achieving sustainable development, and cross-refer to other relevant sources of information about the UK's approach.

Rents-to-mortgages Schemes

22. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the rents-to-mortgages schemes. [17023]

Mr. Clappison: None. Rent-to-mortgage is an option under the highly successful right-to-buy scheme, which has enabled over 1.3 million council tenants in England to buy their home since 1980.

Opencast Mining

23. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will change planning procedures to make it more difficult for opencast coal operators to obtain planning consent. [17024]

Sir Paul Beresford: No. The mineral planning guidance note on opencast coal was fully reviewed and revised in July 1994. There are currently no plans to revise it again.

Council Tax (Essex)

24. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the level of council tax likely to be levied in Essex in 1997–98. [17025]

Sir Paul Beresford: No such assessment has been made, as it is for local authorities to set their own levels of council tax in their area in the light of local needs and priorities.

Local Authority Housing

25. **Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his plans for the transfer of local authority housing. [17026]

Mr. Curry: Transfer is an excellent way of increasing investment in the local authority stock and the Government have therefore recently introduced a package of measures aimed at encouraging local authorities to transfer more of their stock to registered social landlords. We have also announced our intention to use the housing investment programme to encourage local authorities to consider how they can best use transfer to meet the need for investment in their stock and thus also make best use of the limited public funds available for housing.

28. **Sir Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his current estimate of the numbers of dwellings in local authority ownership which could be transferred to different ownership through large-scale voluntary transfer. [17029]

Mr. Curry: With the new package of measures announced by the Government last autumn to encourage stock transfer, we expect the level of transfer to increase significantly. Taken together with sales to individuals, we currently anticipate a reduction in local authority stock of just over 1 million homes or around 30 per cent. in the next 10 years.

Air Pollution

26. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about air pollution. [17027]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Act 1995 set up the legislative framework for a national strategy for air quality and for action by local authorities to assess and manage air quality. The strategy, which will be published shortly, will set out air quality standards and objectives, and will outline the measures which will be taken at international, national and local level in order to meet those objectives.

27. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding air pollution. [17028]

Mr. Clappison: My Department has received 420 representations, from members of the public, business, local authorities and other bodies, in response to consultation on the draft national strategy for air quality, which the Government are preparing in accordance with the Environment Act 1995.

Council House Sales

29. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants since May 1979. [17030]

Mr. Clappison: Over 1.48 million tenants purchased their homes from English local authorities and new towns between April 1979 and September 1996.

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16796]

Sir Paul Beresford: A list of the number of written and oral PQs answered by my Department in the Sessions 1982–83 to 1995–96, as supplied by the parliamentary on-line information service unit, is given. This information is also available in the House Library. Figures for 1979–80 to 1981–82 are not available.

Year	Written	Oral
1982–83	1,457	367
1983–84	4,181	626
1984–85	3,328	370
1985–86	3,624	415
1986–87	2,355	290
1987–88	5,214	554
1988–89	4,911	423
1989–90	5,947	369
1990–91	3,233	367
1991–92	1,513	182
1992–93	5,029	541
1993–94	3,301	377
1994–95	2,970	405
1995–96	2,481	317

Providing the number of instances in each year that questions have been given a reply of disproportionate cost or that the information was not held centrally would themselves involve disproportionate cost.

Household Waste-derived Compost

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the report on the potential markets for household waste-derived compost to be published; and to whom he plans to circulate it. [17714]

Mr. Gummer: The report, entitled "Markets and Quality Requirements for composts and Digestates from the Organic Fraction of Household Wastes", has been prepared under a research contract now managed by the Environment Agency. It was made public in January; and priced copies will be available in March, reference number CWM 147/96, from the Waste Management Information Bureau, AEA Technology plc, F6 Culham, Oxfordshire OX14 3DB, telephone number 01235 463162. Complimentary copies are due to be sent to the Environment Select Committee, the British library, the Composting Association, the National Composting Development Association, the Institute of Waste Management, the Environmental Services Association, the Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management and the specialist press. My Department promoted the report at the Composting Association's annual conference in November 1996 and will be doing so again at a National Composting Development Association conference in March 1997.

Local Government Legislation

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the legislation for which his Department has been responsible which affects *(a)* local government finance and *(b)* local government responsibilities since June 1979. [18149]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department has been responsible for the primary legislation listed in the years since 1979. Only Acts affecting the general responsibilities of local government are shown. Some of the Acts are private Members' legislation.

(a) local government finance

Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980

Local Government Finance Act 1982

Rates Act 1984

Rates Support Grant Act 1986

Local Government Finance Act 1987

Local Government Act 1987

Rates Support Grant Act 1987

Local Government Finance Act 1988

Rates Support Grant Act 1988

Local Government and Housing Act 1989

Caravans (Standard Community Charge and Rating) Act 1991

Community Charges (Substitute Setting) Act 1991

Community Charges (General Reduction) Act 1991

Local Government Finance and Valuation Act 1991

Local Government Finance Act 1992

Non-Domestic Rating Act 1992

Non-Domestic Rating Act 1993

Non-Domestic Rating Act 1994

Non-Domestic Rating (Information) Act 1996

Rating (Caravans and Boats) Act 1996.

(b) local government

Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982

Local Authorities (Expenditure Powers) Act 1983

Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Local Government Act 1985

Local Government Act 1986

Local Government Act 1988

Local Government and Housing Act 1989

Local Government Finance (Publicity for Auditors Reports) Act 1991

Local Government Act 1992

Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993

Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1996

Rivers (Water Abstraction)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many rivers in England and Wales have been identified as suffering from low flow due to over-abstraction; what percentage of those identified have had *(a)* short-term and *(b)* long-term solutions implemented to restore their natural flow; and if he will make a statement. [18015]

Mr. Clappison: In 1990–91 the National Rivers Authority identified in England and Wales a total of 335 km of reaches in 40 rivers as having low flows and affected by water abstraction. Of those 40, nine have fully implemented solutions, nine have solutions in progress, eight have solutions identified, six continue to be investigated and eight have been found not to have problems due to abstraction. By March 1996, the total length of the affected reaches had been reduced by 207 km. The Environment Agency has targets to reduce this by a further 106 km by March 1999.

Waltham Forest

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what bids into the single regeneration budget from the London borough of Waltham Forest have been successful in each year since the SRB was established. [18081]

Sir Paul Beresford: Since the single regeneration budget was introduced the London borough of Waltham Forest has attracted funding for the following bids:

1995–96: South Leytonstone Community Partnership Lea Bridge - A Gateway to Opportunity.

1996–97: Towards Employability - A Strategy for Schools in Waltham Forest.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the expenditure of the Waltham Forest housing action trust in each year since it was set up; and what is its expected final total spending. [18080]

Sir Paul Beresford: Waltham Forest housing action trust has received grant in aid as follows:

1991–92: £0.5 million

1992–93: £11.8 million

1993–94: £25.0 million

1994–95: £36.7 million

1995–96: £34.0 million

1996–97: £20.9 million (Estimate)

Waltham Forest HAT has been asked to base its future plans on a total lifetime grant in aid figure not exceeding £227 million.

Landfill Applications

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he issues on the requirement of a planning authority to consider *(a)* the risk of water pollution and *(b)* the impact from increased traffic on surrounding communities, before granting permission to a planning application for a landfill facility. [18094]

Sir Paul Beresford: Planning guidance in respect of waste disposal, including landfill, is contained in planning policy guidance note 23 "Planning and Pollution Control". This guidance is being revised in stages and the first part, to be published later this year, will deal with waste management. Attention is drawn to the need to consider the risks of water pollution and the effects of traffic in both the original PPG and the revision.

Local Authority Employees

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in rank order the number of employees for each local authority per 1,000 of the resident population for the most recent three years for which figures are available. [18097]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have today placed the information for 1995 and 1996 in the Library of the House.

The figures are taken from the "Joint Staffing Watch". The survey was reviewed in 1994 and from 1995 onwards a revised survey form was introduced which included a different service analysis, introduced figures for whole-time equivalent employment, and introduced new guidelines on the recording of part time staff. As a result of these changes, it is not possible to provide comparable figures for 1994.

The levels of employment in individual authorities are not directly comparable because of variations in population structure, social characteristics and the extent to which they use private firms and contractors or act as agents for other authorities.

Nitrogen Oxide Emissions

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the change in nitrogen oxide emission levels over the last 20 years; and if he will make a statement. [18016]

Mr. Clappison: Emissions for nitrogen oxides were 2,206 kilotonnes and 2,218 kilotonnes for 1974 and 1994 respectively. Emissions of nitrogen oxide peaked in 1989 at 2,728 kilotonnes. The 1994 figure represents a 19 per cent. reduction on the 1989 peak. Further information can be found in the Department of the Environment's "Digest of Environmental Statistics 1996", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Timber

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of timber used in the United Kingdom came from certified sustainable sources in each year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [18018]

Mr. Clappison: This information is not available.

The Government are exploring ways in which voluntary certification of timber could both reflect and encourage sustainable forest management, and support the recently agreed proposals for action on this set out in the final report of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development's intergovernmental panel on forests. The Government will now be pressing for effective international action to implement the IPF's proposals.

Single Regeneration Budget (Lancashire)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what bids into the single regeneration budget from local authorities and others within the county of Lancashire have *(a)* been submitted and *(b)* been approved in each year of the budget's existence. [18435]

Sir Paul Beresford: Over the three annual rounds of the single regeneration budget, the following number of bids have been received from local authorities and others in Lancashire:

	Outline	*Encouraged*	*Approved*
Round I	34	9	5
Round II	32	8	4
Round III	12	7	6

First Aid Staff (Schools)

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the statutory requirements regarding the number of qualified first aid staff in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools. [18392]

Sir Paul Beresford: Schools, like all workplaces, are required by the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 to make first aid provision for their employees.

Although school pupils as non-employees are not covered by these requirements, the guidance covering the regulations recognises that employers will wish to make provision for them.

Additionally, guidance from the Department for Education and Employment and the Welsh Office describes the common law responsibilities of schools "in loco parentis". The guidance suggests that combined provision for both employees and students is sensible when employers are making their assessment of the number of first-aiders required.

Noise Pollution

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department is currently undertaking into noise pollution; and if he will make a statement. [17371]

Mr. Clappison: My Department is currently funding the following noise research work:

Domestic noise complaints as seen by local authorities and those complained of.

Noise climate assessment: a review of national and European practices.

Clay target shooting: establishment of noise measurement methodology.

Review of the take-up of the new night noise offence in the Noise Act 1996—phase 1: survey of local authority practice in dealing with domestic night noise complaints as at October 1996 to provide a baseline for studying the take-up and workings of the new offence.

Technical advice to the Department on acoustic issues.

Housing (Disabled People)

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress in implementing the Government's proposals of 12 January 1995 to bring house building regulations into line with those for public and commercial buildings in respect of access for disabled people. [17898]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Given the large number of replies to the consultation, work on analysing them has only just been completed. Further work is being undertaken on the cost of complying with the proposals. The results from this will then be considered by the Building Regulations Advisory Committee, along with the analysis of the responses to the consultation, prior to officials making recommendations to Ministers. Given the uncertainty of the timing of the outstanding work, it is difficult to give a firm commitment, but I hope that it will be possible to take a statement in the early summer.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes have been built since the Government's proposals for access for disabled people to new housing were published on 12 January 1995; how many of them are accessible to disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [17897]

Mr. Jones: Estimates of housebuilding for chronically sick and disabled persons are shown in the publication "Housing and Construction Statistics". Figures for January 1995 to September 1996 can be found in the September quarter 1996 part 1 edition. Copies of this publication are in the Library.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations his Department has received from organisations of and for disabled people on access for disabled people to new housing; what replies he has made; what action he is taking in response to the representations; and if he will make a statement. [17899]

Mr. Jones: There have been 64 letters received since the beginning of this year regarding the extension of part M of the building regulations to dwellings. The letters have come from five individuals and 42 disability organisations, some of which have written more than once. Ministers have replied to 31 of the letters, and officials in my Department have responded to the rest on our behalf. All the replies have indicated the progress that has been made with the analysis of the consultation that was issued concerning this matter, and have indicated that further work is in hand examining the costs of implementing the proposals.

Water Companies

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total indicative value of the water and sewerage companies calculated by his Department at the time of privatisation. [18581]

Mr. Clappison: The total indicative value of the 10 water and sewerage companies calculated at the time of privatisation was £15.2 billion.

Refuse Collection (Barnet)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the response of the council of the London borough of Barnet to the notice served on it on 21 November 1996 in respect of its decision to assign refuse collection work to its direct service organisation. [18865]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has considered the response made by the authority on 18 December. He has today given a direction to the authority because it still appears to him that the authority acted in an anti-competitive manner in assigning work to its direct service organisation. He took this view because of the way in which the authority had reached its decision to assign the work. The effect of the direction is that the authority must retender the work immediately and seek consent if it wishes to continue to carry out the work in-house.

Hedgerows

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the result of the Government's consultation on the draft hedgerows regulations. [18921]

Mr. Clappison: The Government yesterday laid in both Houses draft hedgerows regulations, revised in the light of responses to the public consultation.

Copies of the report on the analysis of the responses to the consultation have been placed in the Library of the House.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 5 March 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Hunger Strikers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what independent medical assessment *(a)* is allowed and *(b)* has been made of the condition of the hunger strikers at Rochester prison or moved from Rochester prison; [18473]

(2) if he will make a statement on the medical condition of *(a)* Mr. Naser Lechibi and *(b)* the other hunger strikers at Rochester prison or moved from Rochester prison. [18472]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* No immigration detainees at Rochester are currently refusing food. Those who do so are taken to an outside hospital if their condition gives cause for concern. Detainees who persist in food refusal clearly take risks with their health: medical records are confidential, but none of those who took part in the recent protest is currently assessed as giving cause for medical concern.

Taylor Inquiry

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if evidence from Dr. Ed Walker was offered to the Taylor inquiry into the Hillsborough disaster; for what reasons he was not called to give oral evidence; and if he will make a statement. [18500]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* Dr. Walker did not give evidence to the Taylor inquiry into the Hillsborough disaster. The inquiry was concerned with the events at the Hillsborough stadium. The precise circumstances in which the victims died were matters for the coroner's inquest. A statement given by Dr. Walker to police on 20 July 1989 was made available to the coroner's inquest.

Child Prostitution

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the penalties for those who entice children into prostitution. [18492]

Mr. Maclean: The Government announced on 16 January that it had decided to carry out a review of existing maximum penalties for sex offences. This will include the offence of causing or encouraging the prostitution of a girl under 16. The purpose of the review will be to identify any anomalies in existing penalties, and to ensure that penalties properly reflect the comparative gravity of existing offences.

Telephone Interceptions

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received calling for interceptions of telephone conversations involving alleged criminals to be usable as evidence in criminal trials; and if he will make a statement. [18448]

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Lord Lloyd of Berwick has raised the issue on a number of occasions, including at chapter 7 of the report of his inquiry into legislation against terrorism, where he recommended that section 9 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985 be amended so as to allow the prosecution to adduce intercepted material in cases affecting national security. That recommendation is under consideration. The views of the law enforcement, security and intelligence agencies have been sought by my Department. Otherwise, I am aware of no recent representations on the subject.

Knives

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people *(a)* aged under 18 years and *(b)* in total were (i) arrested for, (ii) cautioned for, (iii) charged with and convicted of offences relating to knives in north Yorkshire in each of the last five years; [18261]

(2) how many people *(a)* from York, *(b)* from north Yorkshire and *(c)* nationally were convicted of offences relating to knives carried out by (i) persons of all ages and (ii) persons aged under 18 years at the time of the offence in each of the last three years. [18262]

Mr. Maclean: Detailed data of the number of people arrested and charged are not collected centrally.

Information available on the number of people cautioned, prosecuted and convicted from 1991 to 1995 is given in the tables. 1996 data will not be available until the autumn.

Table A. Number of persons aged under 18 years cautioned, prosecuted at magistrates' courts and convicted at all courts for offences relating to knives by type of offence and area 1991–95

Area	Disposal	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
	Carrying article with blade or point in a public place [Criminal Justice Act 1988, Sec 139]					
York petty sessional division[1]						
	Cautions	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Prosecutions	1	—	—	—	2
	Convictions	1	—	—	—	2
North Yorkshire police force area						
	Cautions	1	9	4	1	3
	Prosecutions	3	—	3	1	4
	Convictions	3	—	2	1	4
England and Wales						
	Cautions	328	423	418	497	544
	Prosecutions	274	277	222	392	435
	Convictions	185	207	168	296	305
	Carrying of offensive weapons[2] *without lawful authority or reasonable excuse in a public place [Prevention of Crime Act 1953, Sec 1]*					
York petty sessional division[1]						
	Cautions	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Prosecutions	1	1	—	1	2
	Convictions	1	1	—	1	1

Table A. Number of persons aged under 18 years cautioned, prosecuted at magistrates' courts and convicted at all courts for offences relating to knives by type of offence and area 1991–95

Area	Disposal	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
North Yorkshire police force area						
	Cautions	2	11	4	3	5
	Prosecutions	4	4	6	7	4
	Convictions	3	4	4	4	3
England and Wales						
	Cautions	1,258	1,274	1,387	1,350	1,290
	Prosecutions	731	733	659	692	834
	Convictions	494	439	377	408	482

[1] Includes convictions at the Crown court where the committing magistrates' court was York PSD.
[2] May include a small number of offences involving truncheons etc.

Table B. Number of persons, all ages, cautioned, prosecuted at magistrates' courts and convicted at all courts for offences relating to knives by type of offence and area 1991–95

Area	Disposal	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
	Carrying article with blade or point in a public place [Criminal Justice Act 1988, Sec 139]					
York petty sessional division[1]						
	Cautions	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Prosecutions	8	3	10	4	13
	Convictions	6	3	7	4	10
North Yorkshire police force area						
	Cautions	4	11	7	4	4
	Prosecutions	28	10	25	13	26
	Convictions	21	9	19	9	20
England and Wales						
	Cautions	704	1,055	1,282	1,292	1,512
	Prosecutions	2,397	2,640	2,553	3,366	3,474
	Convictions	1,737	1,848	1,852	2,502	2,559
	Carrying of offensive weapons[2] *without lawful authority or reasonable excuse in a public place [Prevention of Crime Act 1953, Sec 1]*					
York petty sessional division[1]						
	Cautions	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Prosecutions	11	18	18	9	11
	Convictions	9	16	14	3	8
North Yorkshire police force area						
	Cautions	4	20	6	8	7
	Prosecutions	51	55	56	58	42
	Convictions	34	42	38	35	28
England and Wales						
	Cautions	2,697	2,911	3,172	3,026	2,973
	Prosecutions	5,979	5,795	5,148	5,419	5,215
	Convictions	3,907	3,606	3,118	3,295	3,190

[1] Includes convictions at the Crown court where the committing magistrates' court was York PSD.
[2] May include a small number of offences involving truncheons etc.

Mrs. Ganiat Lasoye (Deportation Order)

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will review the deportation order served on Mrs. Ganiat Lasoye; [18223]

(2) if he will reverse the deportation order on Mrs. Ganiat Lasoye; what professional advice and from which *(a)* bodies and *(b)* individuals he assessed prior to the decision to deport her; what assessment he has made of the adequacy of procedures followed in taking the decision to deport her; and if he will make a statement. [18245]

Mr. Kirkhope: I am satisfied that the original deportation decision was properly based. However, in view of the exceptional compassionate circumstances, we have concluded that deportation action should not now be taken.

Prison Staff Ratios

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current average staff to prisoner ratio in category C prisons. [17973]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 5 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the current staff to prisoner ratio in category C prisons.

There are 12,840 prisoners held in dedicated category C training prisons, including Buckley Hall prison which is managed by Group 4.

The requested provisional information is shown below.

Prisoners	Staff	Ratio
12,840	9,842	1:1.3

Inquest Proceedings (Oxford)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the inquest, about which the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden has written to the Oxford coroner, Nicholas Gardiner, to be reconvened; and if he will make a statement. [18103]

Mr. Sackville: The date for the resumption of the inquest is a matter for the Oxfordshire coroner to decide. I understand that he hopes to list the case for hearing in early April.

American Prison Ship (Purchase)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if a contract has been agreed to purchase the American prison ship Resolution. [17974]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Scott to Mr. George Howarth, dated 5 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the prison ship "Resolution".

The Prison Service has bought a floating prison, the "Resolution" (now renamed the "Weare"). The contract for the purchase of the vessel was ratified on 31 January.

TRANSPORT

Traffic Congestion

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish by region the residual life remaining in those parts of the trunk road network in England, including bridges, classified as condition orange and condition red for traffic congestion according to the maps produced by the national roads network assessment system for *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 2005 and *(c)* 2015. [17704]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 26 February 1997]:* Residual life provides a measure of the remaining strength of a road in terms of the number of years of forecast traffic loading it is estimated to be able to carry before strengthening should be considered. Even at the stage of zero residual life, the road will perform quite satisfactorily for an indeterminate period—generally some years—but with the expectation of increasing levels of minor repair works.

The condition of the trunk road network is good, the percentage of the motorway network having less than zero residual life being only 3.9 per cent. and for all-purpose trunk roads only 7.3 per cent. These percentages are within the target of 7 to 8 per cent. set by the PAC in 1991 to be achieved by the year 2000 and demonstrate the success of recent investment in the national network.

The same concept of defining residual life cannot be applied to bridges or other structures. They have much longer nominal lives before strengthening may be required and the deterioration process is quite different.

The following six tables indicate the residual life by region in 1995 of those parts of the road network classified as orange or red based on high growth forecasts for traffic levels.

Annex A: Residual life of those parts of the trunk road network classified as condition orange in 1995

Region	*<0*	*0–4*	*5–9*	*10–14*	*15–19*	*>19*
London	16.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	28.00	54.00
Southern	7.32	8.55	12.00	11.39	23.74	37.00
Midland	8.20	15.06	16.83	15.12	16.09	28.70
Northern	4.75	7.11	12.44	13.51	29.41	32.78

Annex B: Residual life of those parts of the trunk road network classified as condition red in 1995

Region	*<0*	*0–4*	*5–9*	*10–14*	*15–19*	*>19*
London	16.93	12.94	18.35	14.51	15.65	21.62
Southern	4.52	5.87	11.16	7.61	28.30	42.54
Midland	8.28	9.93	14.37	17.31	16.69	33.42
Northern	6.56	8.82	10.39	15.67	31.36	27.20

Annex C: Residual life of those parts of the trunk road network classified as condition orange in 2005

Region	*<0*	*0–4*	*5–9*	*10–14*	*15–19*	*>19*
London	13.54	9.80	14.99	21.33	13.54	26.80
Southern	4.95	6.88	10.08	13.05	25.50	39.54
Midland	6.53	11.87	13.23	13.39	16.69	38.29
Northern	5.42	7.34	11.68	12.69	30.12	32.75

Annex D: Residual life of those parts of the trunk road network classified as condition red in 2005

Region	*<0*	*0–4*	*5–9*	*10–14*	*15–19*	*>19*
London	15.93	12.18	17.27	13.79	16.60	24.23
Southern	5.97	7.51	11.63	9.27	28.25	37.37
Midland	10.73	10.56	13.67	15.77	15.70	33.57
Northern	6.16	5.68	12.01	14.26	15.48	46.41

Annex E: Residual life of those parts of the trunk road network classified as condition orange in 2015

Region	*<0*	*0–4*	*5–9*	*10–14*	*15–19*	*>19*
London	0.00	46.97	21.21	10.61	4.55	16.66
Southern	3.77	5.03	8.16	11.58	27.97	43.49
Midland	6.12	7.89	9.12	11.68	18.62	46.57
Northern	10.74	8.66	11.36	12.76	21.98	34.50

Annex F: Residual life of those parts of the trunk road network classified as condition red in 2015

Region	<0	0–4	5–9	10–14	15–19	>19
London	16.33	11.77	16.79	16.42	14.96	23.73
Southern	6.10	8.63	12.02	11.74	24.29	37.22
Midland	7.88	11.92	14.42	14.83	15.67	35.28
Northern	4.03	6.60	11.51	13.06	27.79	37.01

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish by region the maintenance planned by the Highways Agency for those parts of the trunk road network in England, including bridges, classified as condition orange and condition red for traffic congestion according to the maps produced by the national roads network assessment system for *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 2005 and *(c)* 2015. [17705]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 26 February 1997]:* The Highways Agency's plans for future maintenance of the trunk road network have not yet been finalised.

M45 (Litter)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which body is responsible for collecting litter on the M45; and when it was last collected. [17313]

Mr. Watts: Responsibility for litter clearance on the M45 lies with the Highways Agency, which has instructed its maintenance agents to clear litter as necessary to meet the obligations imposed by the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The last general litter clearance on the M45 was carried out in March 1996.

Ferry Safety

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the regulations which apply to roll-on roll-off ferries with regard to the ration of *(a)* lifeboats and *(b)* lifejackets required to the number of passengers aboard. [18685]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* For vessels built before 1 July 1986, the relevant regulations are regulations 4 and 5 of the Merchant Shipping (Life-Saving Appliances) Regulations 1980, SI No. 1980/538.

For vessels built on or after 1 July 1986, the relevant regulation is regulation 5 of the Merchant Shipping (Life-Saving Appliances) Regulations 1986, SI No. 1986/1066.

Overloaded Aircraft

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *70*, if he will estimate the cost of answering the question of how many aircraft have been found to be overloaded in each of the past two years. [18651]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The Civil Aviation Authority audits UK airlines to ensure that their aircraft are operated within the limitations of their performance, including those limitations associated with aircraft weight. Reports of these audits are placed on the file of the relevant air operator's certificate holder.

The number of incidents of overloading can therefore be obtained only by manual examination of the individual reports of each inspection carried out in the last 24 months on aircraft operated by the 230 UK holders of air operators' certificates. In this case, the hon. Member's question could be answered only at disproportionate cost.

Coastguard Service

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what are his plans for staff levels at the Liverpool Coastguard station; [18635]

(2) what are his plans for the future of the Oban (Scotland) Coastguard station; [18630]

(3) what are his plans for the future of the Pentland (Orkney) Coastguard station; [18632]

(4) what are his plans for the future of Tyne Tees (Tynemouth) Coastguard station; [18636]

(5) for what reason the Oban Coastguard station (Scotland) was left out from that part of the "Focus for Change" review which will exclude the station from officers with enhanced grading; [18631]

(6) if he will make a statement on the treatment of *(a)* Pentland (Orkney) *(b)* Liverpool and *(c)* Tyne Tees (Tynemouth) Coastguard stations under the "Focus for Change review with particular reference to the issue of officers with enhanced grading. [18633]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* I refer the hon. Lady to the answer that I gave on 4 February, *Official Report*, column *574*. The strategy for HM Coastguard is still under development and its effect on the future staffing levels of any rescue centre cannot yet be assessed. Meanwhile, under present arrangements for the implementation of "Focus for Change", 17 rescue centres will have watches headed by the new higher grade watch managers. Pentland, Tyne Tees, Liverpool and Oban will be considered at a later date.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the 1995–96 annual report of the Coastguard agency; and if he will make a statement. [18560]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 5 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Question about The Coastguard Agency 1995–96 Annual Report.

The report is with the printers and will be published shortly. Copies will then be placed in the House Library.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of *(a)* sector stations and *(b)* sector station officers in the Coastguard agency for each of the last seven years; and what are his projections for the number of sector stations in each of the next five years. [18634]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 5 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of sector stations and sector officers in the Coastguard Agency for each of the last five years and projected figures for number of sector stations in the next five years.

	(a) Sector Bases	*(b) Sector Officers*
31 December 1990	97	113
31 December 1991	97	113
31 December 1992	96	96
31 December 1993	93	94
31 December 1994	85	92
31 December 1995	81	92
31 December 1996	79	81

Projections for the number of sector bases for each of the next five years: 64.

Railtrack Debts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures his Department took to write off the debts of Railtrack; and if he will indicate the amounts involved. [18679]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The outstanding capital debt of Railtrack owed to the national loans fund, amounting to £1,229 million, was extinguished by the Railways Act 1993 (Extinguishment of Loans) (Railtrack plc) Order 1996 on 29 March 1996. On that day, £585 million of new debt owed to HM Treasury was created. Part of the £585 million was repaid immediately; the remainder was sold on as bonds in July 1996, after Railtrack was privatised. The company's capital structure was determined with the objective of maximising the overall value of the flotation.

Marine Pollution

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many illegal discharges from ships were reported in each year since 1990, indicating in each case the location; how many resulted in a successful prosecution; and what was the fine imposed. [18559]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Chris Harris to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 5 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Question about illegal discharges from ships which have been reported since 1990.

Details of illegal discharges are published by the Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea (ACOPS) in their annual survey of oil pollution around the coasts of the United Kingdom. The information includes an overall summary of prosecutions together with the level of fines imposed.

Copies of ACOPS reports are available in the House of Commons library up to and including 1995. The report for 1996 is still being compiled.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *64*, on what date he received the submission of the Association of District Councils for his consultations on the introduction of 44-tonne lorries; and for what reason the Association of District Councils was not included in his original answer. [18599]

Mr. Watts: The hon. Member's question to which my answer appeared in the *Official Report* on 10 February was originally due for answer on 31 January and the information in the answer included the responses received by that date. The response from the Association of District Councils was not received until 3 February. I regret that the answer was not fully up to date when published.

Regional Railways

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his current estimate of the annual subsidy which will be paid to each of the regional railway franchisees for 1997–98. [16617]

Mr. Watts: The Office of Passenger Rail Franchise's latest estimates of the grant support to be paid in 1997–98 to the franchisees that make up the previous regional railways sector British Rail are given in the table, together with the comparative British Rail grant claim for 1996–97. Both sets of figures comprise the annual support for passenger rail services grant paid by the franchising director and the financial support provided to train operators by passenger transport executives.

	1996–97 grant claim £ *million*	*1997–98 estimated payments* £ *million*
South Wales and West	84.8	70.9
Merseyrail	84.1	80.7
North West Regional Railways	191.9	184.9
Regional Railways North East	223.2	224.5
Central	198.1	187.5
ScotRail	292.3	280.1

TREASURY

Price Indices

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the main price indices used in each EU member state; and what assessment he has made of their *(a)* basis, *(b)* data collection procedures and *(c)* methods of calculation relative to those used in the United Kingdom. [17356]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. David Shaw, dated 5 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the main price indices used in each EU Member State; and what assessment has been made on their basis, data collection procedures and methods of calculation relative to those used in the United Kingdom.

All EU Member States produce a consumer price index (CPI) based on the expenditure patterns of consumers in their country for national purposes. The last study of EU national prices indices was carried out by Rudolf Teekens of the Institute of Social Studies in the 1989 Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities, publication *Consumer Price Indices in the EC—Similarities, Differences and Proposals for Harmonisation*, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library. A table from the report listing the main prices indices for each country is attached. This is the latest information available but it is possible that the situation has changed since the report was produced.

In addition to nation price indices the EU Member States have been working with Eurostat for over three years to produce harmonised measures of inflation expressly for the purposes of comparisons across Member States. This has involved assessment of the basis of the indices, the data collection procedures and the method of calculation in each country.

These harmonised inflation figures will be used to inform decisions on which Member States meet the conditions to participate in EMU under Article 109j of the Treaty on European Union. However, they are not intended to replace existing national CPIs. The RPI remains the best indicator of UK consumer price inflation.

This programme of harmonisation has lead to the production of Harmonised indices of consumer prices (HICP) by each Member State, Norway and Iceland. The first figures for all 15 Member States will be published by the EC on 7 March 1997. The figures for the UK were published by ONS on 26 February 1997.

Table: A.1

Country	*Name of the Index, Widest Field of Observation*
D	Cost-of-Living Index for all Private Households (Preisindex für die Lebenshaltung aller Privaten Haushalte) published items of expenditure: 755
G	Consumer Price Index for Urban Households of Workers and Employees (Indice des Prix à la Consommation des Ménages Urbains dont le chef est ouvrier ou employé published items of expenditure: 296
I	National Consumer Price Index (Prezzi al Comsumo per l'intera Collettività Nazionale) published items of expenditure: 878
NL	Consumer Price Index for the Whole Population (Prijsindexcijfer van de Gezinsconsumptie voor de Totale Bevolking) published items of expenditure: 690
B	Consumer Price Index (Indice des Prix à la Consommation) published items of expenditure: 401
L	Consumer Price Index (Indice des Prix à la Consommation) published items of expenditure: 255
UK	General Index of Retail Prices published items of expenditure: 394
IRL	Consumer Price index published items of expenditure: 722
DK	Consumer Price Index (Forbrugerprisindeks) published items of expenditure: 523
G	Consumer Price Index published items of expenditure: 386
E	Consumer Price Index (Indice de Precios de Consumo) published items of expenditure: 428
P	Consumer Price Index (Indice de Precos no Consumidor) published items of expenditure: 500

Income Tax

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage to total Government revenue is accounted for by income tax. [18145]

Mr. Jack: Income tax accounted for 25¼ per cent. of all general Government receipts in 1995–96. The Budget forecast this percentage falling to 24 per cent. in 1997–98, reflecting the 1995 and 1996 Budget reductions in income tax.

Employee Share Ownership Schemes

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many statutory employee share ownership trusts have been notified to the Inland Revenue in each year since 1990; [17979]

(2) how many *(a)* firms and *(b)* employees participate in the employee share ownership plans currently known to the Inland Revenue. [17978]

Mr. Jack: Statutory employee share ownership trusts—ESOTs—do not require formal advanced approval from, or registration by, the Inland Revenue. The Revenue is, however, prepared to say whether a particular draft or executed trust deed meets the statutory ESOT conditions. Not all companies will see a need to clear a trust deed in advance; and companies clearing deeds are not required to state the number of employees prospectively covered by them. The number of statutory ESOTs cleared by the Revenue since 1990 is in the table. Information about the number of firms and participating employees in all forms of employee share ownership plan is not available.

	Number of statutory ESOTs
1990–91	6
1991–92	5
1992–93	3
1993–94	2
1994–95	6
1995–96	2
1996–97[1]	27

[1] To end February 1997.

Europe Community (UK Contribution)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will express the United Kingdom's gross

contribution to the EC in 1995–96 as a proportion of the revenue from the standard rate of income tax for the same period. [18084]

Mr. Oppenheim: In financial year 1995–96 the UK's total gross contribution to the European Community budget after abatement was £7,635 million. This was equivalent to 17.5 per cent. of revenue from the basic rate of income tax in that year of £43,600 million. However, the UK's contribution to the European Community is, of course, funded by total general Government receipts. In 1995–96 our gross contribution to the Community was equivalent to 2.8 per cent. of the total of £269,200 million.

Inflation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the reliability of the governor of the Bank of England's forecasts of the rate of inflation. [18398]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Bank published in its February 1996 inflation report an assessment of its forecasting record since it began publishing the inflation report in February 1993.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account he took of the potential impact of increases in costs outside the UK's control in setting his inflation target. [18397]

Mrs. Knight: The Chancellor took full account of this, and other factors, in setting the inflation target of 2½ per cent. or less. As he said in his 1995 Mansion house speech, events outside our control, such as sharp movements in commodity prices, could temporarily take us away from the objective. But setting interest rates consistently at the level judged necessary to achieve the inflation target should ensure that inflation will remain in the range 1 to 4 per cent. Since the Government started setting an explicit target for inflation, underlying inflation has averaged 2.6 per cent.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he has taken to monitor the accuracy and reliability of his method of calculating inflation. [18399]

Mrs. Knight: The Government's target for inflation is set in terms of underlying inflation—the retail prices index excluding mortgage interest payments. The RPI, which is compiled from a total of 120,000 prices collected each month from 146 locations throughout the UK is determined by recommendations of the Retail Prices Index Advisory Committee. The Office for National Statistics, which compiles and publishes the RPI, has in place a number of checks to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the index including auditing of monthly price collection, and regular updating of its coverage.

Pneumonia Deaths

Ms Jowell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of recorded deaths from pneumonia in each region for the month of January in each year since 1990 to date. [18284]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Tessa Jowell, dated 5 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me, as Director of the Office for National Statistics, to reply to your recent question asking what was the number of recorded deaths from pneumonia in each region for the month of January in each year since 1990 to date.

The following tables show the number of deaths certified as due to pneumonia (ICD[1] 480–486) that occurred in January to (a) residents of each regional health authority from 1990 to 1995 and (b) residents of each regional office area from 1996 to 1997. Please note that the figures for 1996 and 1997 are provisional

(a) Deaths due to pneumonia, January occurrences, 1990–95

Regional Health Authority	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*[2]	*1994*	*1995*
Northern	220	195	326	334	347	307
Yorkshire	303	239	358	452	442	401
Trent	352	339	349	509	592	548
East Anglian	160	156	149	250	308	299
North West Thames	241	217	248	385	364	357
North East Thames	289	268	319	437	471	563
South East Thames	338	334	354	526	484	606
South West Thames	216	280	275	401	394	442
Wessex	196	244	198	366	434	456
Oxford	170	172	166	262	298	295
South Western	266	239	249	366	391	408
West Midlands	347	354	375	567	566	566
Mersey	258	238	193	327	342	313
North Western	339	294	317	489	468	509
Wales	224	195	197	344	338	397

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

[2] New procedures for coding cause of death from 1993 mean that figures for pneumonia from 1993 onwards are not comparable with those in earlier years. The increase due to the new coding practice is about 50 per cent. More details can be found in ONS Series DH2, no.21, *Mortality statistics: cause, 1993 (revised) and 1994* (published in 1996), copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

(b) Deaths due to pneumonia, January occurrences, 1996–97 (provisional)

Regional Office	*1996*	*1997*
Northern and Yorkshire	965	1,234
Trent	776	1,154
Anglia and Oxford	846	1,097
North Thames	1,097	1,784
South Thames	1,314	2,035
South and West	1,044	1,773
West Midlands	744	990
North West	1,137	1,436
Wales	459	778

Crude Oil Prices

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each of the last five years for which figures are available the *(a)* average *(b)* highest and *(c)* lowest prices of crude oil during each year. [18512]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The information requested is available in the "International Financial Statistics" publication of the International Monetary Fund. Oil prices can be found in

the "Commodity Prices" tables, which is on page 84 of the February edition of the monthly report, with annual data also available in the yearbook.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of PFI contracts which have been agreed in the last financial year for which figures are available; what were the total annual payments to be made in respect of those contracts; and what will be the total value of the payments made over the life of the contracts. [18582]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The information is not available in the form requested. However, annual PFI data showing historic and forecast capital investment is published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report, tables 5.4 and 5.5. This was supplemented by my answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) on 10 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *125–26*. Table 5.6 shows aggregated estimates of revenue commitments for signed projects, up to the year 2024–25. A list of major agreed projects as of 26 November 1996, and their capital value, was placed in the House of Commons Library in response to a further parliamentary question from the hon. Member for Newham, North-East on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *510–11*. This will be updated on a quarterly basis, with the next list due to be placed in the library at the end of March. The total number of PFI deals is not held centrally.

Local Authority Borrowing

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the quotas for lending to local authorities by the Public Works Loan Board. [19201]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Public Works Loan Commissioners have issued a circular today notifying local authorities that there will be no change in the formula for calculating quotas for 1997–98.

Copies of the circular have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Anglo-French Peacekeeping Missions

Mr. Temple-Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions, since Britain joined the European Community, British and French forces have been on active service jointly in a conflict or peacekeeping role; and in which countries these actions took place. [18434]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Since 1973, UK and French armed forces have served jointly in one conflict—the Gulf war—and in the following peacekeeping operations: UNAVEM III, UN Angola verification mission; MINURSO, UN mission for the referendum in Western Sahara; UNAMIC, UN advanced mission in Cambodia; UNTAC, UN transitional authority in Cambodia; UNPROFOR, UN protection force in former Yugoslavia; UNCRO, UN confidence restoration mission in Croatia; UNPREDEP, UN preventive deployment force, Macedonia; UNTAES, UN transitional administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium, Croatia; UNMOP, UN mission of observers in Prevlaka, Croatia; UNOMIG, UN Observers mission in Georgia; and UNIKOM, UN Iraq/Kuwait observation mission.

Earth Summit II

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what preparations his Department is making for Earth summit II and for the preparatory conferences leading up to the summit. [18498]

Dr. Liam Fox: This Department will play its full part, with other Government Departments, at the intersessional meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development being held in New York between 24 February and 7 March, at the fifth meeting of the CSD in New York between 7 and 25 April, and at the UN General Assembly special session in New York between 23 and 27 June. The UK aim is to ensure a successful review of progress since Rio and the setting of priorities for the years ahead. FCO officials from both the diplomatic and aid wings will form part of the UK delegations to these meetings. Our missions overseas, including the UK missions to the UN, will continue to promote UK objectives and priorities for sustainable development. The aid wing has also provided some financial support to help non-governmental organisations in developing countries to prepare for and attend these meetings.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16795]

Mr. Freeman: A list of the number of written and oral questions answered by the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service, in the Sessions 1982–83 to 1995–96, as supplied by the parliamentary on-line information service unit, has been placed in the House Library. Figures for 1979–80 to 1981–82 are not available.

The other information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Breakfast Tours

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who has been responsible for organising the business breakfast to be held in Carlisle on 10 March; at whose request the meeting was arranged; what is the estimated cost; and which Government Department will bear the costs. [18421]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 3 March 1997]:* The Carlisle business breakfast has been cancelled.

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) of 24 February, *Official Report*, column *64*, if he will list for each event the organisation responsible for organising the business breakfast; and at whose request it was arranged. [18422]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 3 March 1997]:* I have asked the relevant Government office to arrange each of the business breakfasts.

European Union Funding

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what EU regional aid has been secured for *(a)* Blyth Valley and *(b)* the north-east of England in each of the last two years. [18575]

Mr. Greg Knight: Funding to the value of £4,143,902 has been secured from EU structural funds specifically for the Blyth Valley area in the last two years. In addition, a further £3,990,327 has been gained for projects covering the wider south-east Northumberland area; mostly in the form of business support measures funded from European regional development fund and training activities funded through the European social fund. Other region-wide projects will also provide benefits for the Blyth Valley area.

The total amount of EU structural funds secured for the north-east of England in the last two years is approximately £235 million. This includes the objective 2 and 5b programmes as well as various Community initiatives which operate in specified parts of the region. The north-east also benefits from a share of the national objective 3 programme which provides training and counselling for the unemployed. In addition, the north-east of England will continue to benefit from objective 2 funding until 2001, and a programme worth approximately £290 million received in principle agreement from the European Commission on 27 February 1997.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make representations to the European Union to ensure that on all occasions it promptly pays United Kingdom companies which are involved in EU-financed projects. [18612]

Mr. Nelson: The Government take the late payment of commercial debts very seriously and is prepared to make representations to the European Commission about individual cases. The Department is ready to follow up the case which my hon. Friend previously brought to my attention as soon as the company concerned provides the further information that my officials requested from it.

Airbus

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Woking (Sir C. Onslow) of 18 February, *Official Report*, column *483*, what is the expected level of repayments in 1998 and in subsequent years in respect of the launch aid support given to the Airbus A330/340 aircraft. [17372]

Mr. Greg Knight: Forecast repayments are calculated on the basis of expected sales. These underlying assumptions are considered to be commercially confidential.

Timber Exports

Mr Pawsey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the value of timber exports from the United Kingdom. [17338]

Mr. Nelson: UK exports of timber amounted to £38 million in 1995, and £45 million in January to November 1996.

Scientists

Dr. Strang: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many scientists were employed on Government-funded projects at the Institute of Food Research by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18191]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Data on numbers of scientists employed on Government-funded projects at the Institute of Food Research is not readily available. However, in 1995–96, a total of 316 scientist—staff in post—were employed at IFR, and Government-funded projects accounted for approximately 79 per cent. of IFR funding: 46 per cent. from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, 28 per cent. from MAFF and 5 per cent. from other Government users. Comparable funding data is not available for the earlier years.

Research and Development

Dr. Strang: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total research and development expenditure by the Office of Science and Technology for each year from 1980 to the present in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices. [18665]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The Office of Science and Technology was established in 1992. The total annual expenditure by OST on research and development since that time is as follows:

£ million

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Cash	1,008.8	1,134.9	1,173.5	1,249.9	1,261.8
1996–97 prices	1,109.2	1,212.8	1,232.1	1,281.1	1,261.8

[1] Estimated outturn.

Dr. Strang: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total research and development expenditure by the Office of Science and Technology on food and agricultural science for each year from 1980 to the present in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices. [18667]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* Science budget expenditure on research is managed by the research councils. Research in food and agricultural science is funded principally by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council—formerly the Agriculture and Food Research Council. The Medical Research Council also funds some relevant research, figures for which are readily available only for 1994–95 and 1995–96. The figures for spending are in the table.

£000

Year	Cash	Constant prices (1995–96=100)
1980–81	34,477	81,265
1981–82	41,934	82,910
1982–83	43,624	80,517
1983–84	45,840	80,856
1984–85	46,680	78,398
1985–86	52,725	83,950
1986–87	57,149	88,329
1987–88	54,896	80,558
1988–89	61,112	84,055
1989–90	74,311	95,536
1990–91	85,905	102,275
1991–92	96,271	107,717
1992–93	107,294	115,196
1993–94	109,359	114,113
1994–95	126,477	129,446
1995–96	135,715	135,715

In addition, the Natural Environment Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council are involved in joint funding of some relevant research; NERC-funded research in the areas of terrestrial and freshwater sciences and the impact of agriculture on the environment includes research relevant to the agricultural sciences.

Dr. Strang: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total Government research and development expenditure by each Department for each year from 1980 to the present in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices. [18666]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* Reliable information is not available before 1984–85. For the years from 1985–86, I refer the hon. Member to tables D.3 and D.4 in "Forward Look of Government Funded Science, Engineering and Technology 1996", for years 1985–86 to 1998–99, and for 1984–85 to tables 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 of the "Forward Look of Government Funded SET 1994". Copies of both documents are available in the Library of the House.

Dr. Strang: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research and development facilities have been privatised since 1980; and if he will list for each year since 1980 the changes in the number of *(a)* employees and *(b)* scientists employed in those establishments. [18668]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The following research and development facilities have been privatised since 1980 in order to increase their scope and ability to offer services to a wider user community:

The Hydraulic Research Station was converted to an independent company limited by guarantee in 1982.

The National Maritime Institute, formerly part of the National Physical Laboratory, was privatised as a company limited by guarantee in October 1982.

The plant breeding activities of the Agricultural and Food Research Council's plant breeding institute were privatised by trade sale in October 1987, but the establishment itself remained in the public sector as part of the AFRC's institute of plant science research.

The National Measurement Accreditation Service, formerly part of the National Physical Laboratory, was merged with the National Accreditation Council for Certification Bodies, formerly part of the British Standards Institution, in August 1995 to form the United Kingdom Accreditation Service, which was established as a non-profit distribution company limited by guarantee.

The National Engineering Laboratory was privatised by trade sale in October 1995.

The operation of the National Physical Laboratory was contracted out in October 1995.

The Laboratory of the Government Chemist was sold to a management-led consortium in March 1996.

The Transport Research Laboratory was sold to the Transport Research Foundation in April 1996.

The Natural Resources Institute was privatised in May 1996.

AEA Technology, the former commercial arm of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority which absorbed the rationalised activities of the Warren Spring Laboratory in spring 1994, was privatised in September 1996.

Records of the number of *(a)* employees and *(b)* scientists employed in those establishments since 1980 are not kept centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

British Agrochemicals Association Ltd.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what representations he has received from the British Agrochemicals Association Ltd. in the past 12 months; what was the subject of those representations; and if he will make a statement; [18453]

(2) what meetings he has had with the British Agrochemicals Association Ltd. in the past 12 months; what was the subject of the meetings; and if he will make a statement. [18452]

Mr. Greg Knight: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Small Business, Industry and Energy attended the British Agrochemical Association's annual luncheon on 4 December 1996.

Neither my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade nor other DTI Ministers have otherwise met or received representations from the British Agrochemicals Association in the last 12 months.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much in total his Department has failed to recover from companies defaulting on the terms of awards of regional selective assistance for each of the last 10 financial years; and if he will list the number of companies which defaulted in each year. [18669]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The amount that the Department has failed to recover in the last 10 financial years is:

	Number of companies	£000
1987–88	3	841
1988–89	19	620
1989–90	40	704
1990–91	55	1,287
1991–92	152	5,988
1992–93	181	9,025
1993–94	89	2,747
1994–95	54	2,543
1995–96	57	1,659
1996 to February 97	99	2,593

In total, this amounts to less than 3 per cent. of the total spend over the same period.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Accountability

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Prime Minister what account is taken of the Crichel Down precedent when considering whether a Minister ought to tender their resignation. [18743]

The Prime Minister: A discussion of the relevance of the events surrounding the resignation of Sir Thomas Dagdale in 1954 to present-day circumstances is contained in the memorandum on "Ministerial accountability and the provision of information to Parliament" which the Government submitted to the Public Service Committee in March 1996. The memorandum was published in volume III of the Public Service Committee's second report, Session 1995–96.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the circumstances in respect of failure or errors by a Government Department in which he would require the appropriate Minister to resign. [18723]

The Prime Minister: This would necessarily depend on the particular circumstance of the case, including the nature of the failure or errors in the Department and the extent of the Minister's personal responsibility for those failures or errors.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sport (Students)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to encourage students to participate in sport and physical recreation. [17414]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 26 February 1997]:* The sport policy statement, "Sport: Raising the Game", published in July 1995, set out the Government's strategy for rebuilding the strength of British sport at all levels, from sport in schools, through sports clubs and further and higher education institutions, to our top athletes.

In "Sport: Raising the Game", we emphasised the importance of students continuing to have the opportunity to develop a lifelong involvement in recreational or competitive sport at colleges and universities. We shall continue to emphasise this at every opportunity.

Following on from the policy statement, in June 1996, the Further Education Funding Council produced its first report on good practice in sports provision in the further education sector, which included audited information. The report also includes examples of good practice. The FEFC has agreed to update its database on sports provision annually, to continue to comment on sports provision and students achievements in sport in its inspection reports, and to monitor changes in provision indicated by statistical returns from colleges.

Also following on from the policy statement, in December 1996, the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals and the Standing Conference of Principals jointly published "Sport in Higher Education", an important part of which is the first ever in-depth survey of the extent and nature of sports facilities and opportunities, including community use, in the higher education sector. The report makes a number of recommendations higher education institutions might pursue to raise the profile of sport, including ensuring that institutions' literature, particularly the prospectus, conveys the scope of available sports facilities and infrastructure, and records students' sporting achievements.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans her Department has to aid universities and colleges in implementing the recommendations of the Bannister committee's report into university sports scholarships. [17408]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 26 February 1997]:* The Bannister committee's report highlights examples of best practice and sets out guidelines for the operation of university sports scholarship schemes. I fully back that guidance and hope further and higher education institutions will follow it. The results will undoubtedly benefit both the institutions and their sports scholars.

Over the post two years, further and higher education institutions across the United Kingdom have benefited substantially from lottery grants for upgrading existing sports facilities and for building new ones. Under the lottery-funded world class performance programme, applications for the funding of individual athletes must be made through the national governing bodies of sport. Where an eligible athlete is also a student, part of the grant awarded to that athlete may be used to offset all or part of the student's study costs. The first awards under the world class performance programme will be made shortly.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what analysis has been made to determine what proportion of students in secondary education who progress on to further or higher education continue to participate in sport and physical recreation while studying. [17409]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 26 February 1997]:* The 1990 general household survey indicated that 91 per cent. of full-time students take part in sport or physical recreation on a regular basis.

British Academy of Sport

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has for visiting the proposed sites for the British Academy of Sport. [18335]

Mr. Sproat: I visited the site proposed by the Heyford Consortium on Tuesday 4 March. I will be visiting the sites proposed by the Sheffield Consortium and by the Central Consortium on Thursday 6 March.

National Lottery (Crewe and Nantwich)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many lottery tickets have been sold in the Crewe and Nantwich parliamentary constituency. [18638]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. I have therefore asked the Director General of the National Lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to the hon. Member and to place copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Sports Council Lottery Fund

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list by county and district and by amount the awards made in 1995, 1996 and 1997 by the Sports Council Lottery Fund to benefit *(a)* bowls, *(b)* athletics, *(c)* disability sports, *(d)* multi sports, *(e)* tennis and *(f)* mountaineering in Wales. [17300]

Mr. Sproat: Awards totalling more than £23.7 million have been made to 232 sports projects throughout Wales. I have arranged for the lists to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list by county and district the awards made in 1995, 1996 and 1997 by the Sports Council Lottery Fund to benefit the sports of *(a)* football, *(b)* rugby union and *(c)* swimming in the UK indicating the amount of each award. [17306]

Mr. Sproat: Awards totalling over £441 million have been made to 2,603 sports projects throughout the UK. I have arranged for the lists to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Earth Summit II

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what preparations her Department is making for the United Nations General Assembly special session, earth summit II; and for the meetings leading up to the summit. [18396]

Mr. Clappison: I have been asked to reply.

The Department of the Environment is taking the lead within Government on the preparations for the UN General Assembly special session in June.

I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I have given today to my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo).

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Higher Education (Leeds)

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students from Leeds have entered higher education in each of the last five years. [17893]

Mr. Forth: The information requested is not available centrally.

Nursery Places

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many children are currently in nursery places in Lancashire; and what percentage this is of children of nursery school age. [17709]

(2) how many children are currently in nursery places in each local education authority in England; and what percentage that is of the children of nursery school age in each case. [18419]

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children are currently in nursery places in the London borough of Waltham Forest; and what percentage this is of children of nursery school age. [18079]

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Members to statistical bulletin 2/97 which shows numbers and percentages of children aged under five in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools by local education authority area in England in January 1996. A copy of the bulletin is in the Library.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many nursery places for four-year-olds were provided by Leeds city council in the last year for which figures are available; what percentage this was of the number of four-year-olds in the Leeds city area; and what was the national average percentage of four-year-olds provided with a nursery place. [18338]

Mr. Squire: There were just under 3,000 four-year-olds in maintained nursery schools or nursery classes in maintained primary schools in the Leeds education authority area. The Department does not publish information on percentages or participation rates of four-year-olds by local education authority area. The percentage of four-year-olds in England who were in maintained nursery schools or nursery classes in maintained primary schools was 24 per cent. in January 1996.

Participation rates of children under five in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools by local education authority area in England in January 1996 were published in a statistical bulletin on 28 February, a copy of which is in the Library.

Student Loans

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students with student loans eligible for repayment are currently *(a)* in arrears and *(b)* in litigation in respect of their repayments. [17718]

Mr. Forth: These are matters for the Student Loans Company. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how often she has met representatives of the Student Loans Company in the last year. [17719]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, met the chairman and chief executive of the Student Loans Company on 9 September.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received in the last year about the student loans system; and if she will make a statement. [17720]

Mr. Forth: Since 1 March 1996, my right hon. Friend has received 202 letters from hon. Members and members of the public on the subject of student loans. In addition, my right hon. Friend has received a number of letters on

student support generally. The breakdown of how many of those letters included student loans issues could be achieved only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received from bodies interested in winning a contract to take over the administration of the student loans system. [17721]

Mr. Forth: Contracting out of the administrative functions of the Student Loans Company will be by competitive tendering. The competition has not yet begun, but to date, there have been three such representations.

Graduate Employment

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the latest figures available for graduates gaining employment related to their degree within six months of graduation in *(a)* teaching, *(b)* engineering, *(c)* biotechnology and research sciences, *(d)* creative arts, *(e)* humanities, *(f)* computing and technology and *(g)* applied mathematics; and if she will make a statement. [17728]

Mr. Forth: The latest available information giving a complete list of occupations entered and other destinations by selected subject of first degree is given in the following table:

First degree home graduates from HE institutions in the UK in 1995 for whom destination is known

Destination/occupation	*Subject of degree:* *Mathematical sciences*	*Computing science*	*Engineering/ technology*[1]	*Humanities*	*Creative arts*	*Education*
Entered employment:						
Managers	246	445	1,147	746	450	244
Professional Occupations	697	1,122	4,994	629	473	8,067
Associate professional occupations	317	2,213	1,266	509	2,405	324
Clerical and secretarial	281	376	507	954	624	220
Craft occupations	11	85	276	34	234	18
Personal protective occupations	72	50	175	410	412	261
Sales	106	107	451	545	687	144
Plant machine operatives	17	17	145	49	83	24
Other occupations	63	99	361	196	329	84
Unknown	36	46	124	63	396	103
Entered study or training	1,090	485	2,055	2,491	1,920	390
Not available for employment	120	145	485	428	439	246
Seeking employment	313	695	1,627	1,002	2,006	883
Total home graduates for whom destination is known	3,369	5,885	13,613	8,056	10,458	11,008

[1] Including biotechnology.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list in rank order local education authorities by GCSE A to C grade results together with the local education authority rank order place for expenditure per pupil. [18090]

Mrs. Gillan: The following table lists in rank order for each local authority the percentage of 15-year-old pupils obtaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C in 1995–96 together with the local education authority rank order place for expenditure per secondary pupil in 1994–95—the latest year for which information is available.

Maintained schools in England[1]

Local education authority	*1995–96* *Pupils aged 15 achieving 5 or more GCSE Grades A*–C* *Per cent.*	*Rank*	*1994–95* *Unit costs Rank*[2,3]
Isles of Scilly	73.1	1	108
Kingston upon Thames	59.9	2	86
Sutton	56.4	3	85
Harrow	53.5	4	90
Barnet	53.4	5	81
North Yorkshire	53.0	6	n/a
North Somerset	52.5	7	n/a
Richmond upon Thames	52.2	8	76
Redbridge	50.8	9	87
West Sussex	50.6	10	47
Buckinghamshire	50.5	11	50
Surrey	50.5	11	45

Maintained schools in England[1]

Local education authority	*1995–96* *Pupils aged 15 achieving 5 or more GCSE Grades A*–C* *Per cent.*	*Rank*	*1994–95* *Unit costs Rank*[2,3]
Bromley	50.3	13	42
Gloucestershire	50.2	14	1
Somerset	50.0	15	18
Solihull	49.6	16	38
Cheshire	49.3	17	29
Dorset	49.3	17	11
Hertfordshire	49.3	17	54
Stockport	49.0	20	25
Berkshire	48.8	21	46
Bury	48.6	22	5
Trafford	48.6	22	65
Wiltshire	48.3	24	20
Shropshire	48.0	25	80
York	47.7	26	n/a
Bath and North East Somerset	47.4	27	n/a
Suffolk	47.0	28	32
Bexley	46.8	29	44
Cambridgeshire	46.7	30	26
Cornwall	46.7	30	33
Kensington and Chelsea	46.7	30	106
Hampshire	46.5	33	30
Northumberland	46.1	34	2
Oxfordshire	45.8	35	58
Dudley	44.9	36	35
South Gloucestershire	44.7	37	n/a
Hereford and Worcester	44.6	38	13
Isle of Wight	44.5	39	4
Lincolnshire	44.5	39	77
Wirral	44.4	41	61
Cumbria	44.2	42	7
Devon	44.2	42	34

Maintained schools in England[1]

Local education authority	1995–96 Pupils aged 15 achieving 5 or more GCSE Grades A*–C Per cent.	Rank	1994–95 Unit costs Rank[2,3]
Havering	44.1	44	88
Sefton	44.0	45	40
Wigan	43.9	46	21
Kent	43.7	47	57
Warwickshire	43.7	47	71
East Riding of Yorkshire	43.6	49	n/a
Northamptonshire	43.5	50	55
East Sussex	43.3	51	74
Essex	43.1	52	66
Camden	43.0	53	99
Bedfordshire	42.7	54	42
Lancashire	42.6	55	70
Hounslow	42.3	56	89
Derbyshire	42.0	57	59
Bolton	41.9	58	53
Norfolk	41.9	58	69
North Tyneside	41.1	60	23
Enfield	41.0	61	74
Hillingdon	40.9	62	93
St. Helens	40.9	62	49
Staffordshire	40.9	62	15
Calderdale	39.7	65	15
Leicestershire	39.7	65	56
Croydon	38.8	67	27
Kirklees	38.4	68	50
Merton	38.3	69	95
Coventry	38.0	70	82
North Lincolnshire	37.6	71	n/a
Redcar and Cleveland	37.6	71	n/a
Sheffield	37.2	73	17
Stockton on Tees	37.2	73	n/a
Gateshead	36.6	75	52
Leeds	36.6	75	37
Nottinghamshire	36.4	77	79
Durham	36.2	78	19
Rotherham	36.2	78	36
Rochdale	35.4	80	38
Tameside	35.4	80	9
Hammersmith and Fulham	35.3	82	105
Wakefield	35.3	82	9
South Tyneside	35.2	84	12
Brent	35.1	85	6
Ealing	34.6	86	84
Doncaster	33.5	87	3
Waltham Forest	33.4	88	78
Oldham	33.3	89	60
Westminster	33.0	90	100
Birmingham	32.9	91	73
Wandsworth	32.8	92	102
Newcastle Upon Tyne	32.7	93	63
North East Lincolnshire	32.4	94	n/a
Walsall	32.2	95	63
Hartlepool	31.9	96	n/a
Sunderland	31.7	97	22
City of Bristol	30.9	98	n/a
Wolverhampton	30.2	99	68
Salford	30.1	100	24
Lewisham	30.0	101	96
Greenwich	29.1	102	98
Bradford	28.9	103	8
Haringey	28.5	104	101
Barnsley	28.2	105	14
Newham	27.9	106	92
Liverpool	27.6	107	91
Barking and Dagenham	27.1	108	72
Manchester	27.0	109	83
Middlesbrough	26.9	110	n/a
Sandwell	26.5	111	48
Hackney	25.7	112	103
Lambeth	25.1	113	107
Southwark	24.6	114	97
Tower Hamlets	23.9	115	104
Knowsley	23.6	116	41
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	22.8	117	n/a
Islington	22.4	118	94
England	41.7		

[1] The figures for GCSE achievements relate to LEA maintained and grant maintained schools in England.
[2] The ranking of unit costs relates to LEA maintained schools only and exclude grant maintained schools. The ranking is in ascending order, the lowest being at the top.
[3] n/a denotes not available.

Student Numbers

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimates she has made of the effects on student numbers of *(a)* reductions in grant levels paid to students and *(b)* the introduction of requirements on students to contribute to the cost of course fees. [18418]

Mr. Forth: The proportion of young people entering full-time higher education has almost doubled since 1989–90, the last year before student loans were introduced. Our policy is not to require full-time undergraduates to contribute to tuition costs. We believe that top-up fees are neither necessary nor desirable, particularly in the light of the additional £200 million funding for higher education announced in the 1996 Budget, but it is for individual universities to decide whether to introduce top-up fees and to estimate what their effect might be on student numbers.

Science A-levels

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of school pupils who were 16 years old in 1996 have gone on to study an A-level science subject, broken down by region and gender. [18339]

Mrs. Gillan: This information is not available.

Medical Training

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimates she has made of the total cost of training a doctor. [18604]

Mr. Forth: The cost of training a doctor has various components at undergraduate and postgraduate level and figures are not available in consistent form for each of these components. Figures for the teaching and other costs for undergraduates are as follows.

Teaching costs are based on figures published annually by the Higher Education Funding Council for England for the average council grant for teaching allocated to each academic subject category as reported by higher education institutions. The figures for pre-clinical and clinical medicine are as follows together with figures for the average level of tuition fee for medical students.

Average Unit of Council Funding (AUCF) and tuition fees for medical students in 1995–96

	Average units of council funding £	*Tuition fee* £
Pre-clinical medicine	3,673	1,600
Clinical medicine	7,167	2,800

A medical student has two years of pre-clinical and three years of clinical tuition. The fees and AUCF for the undergraduate courses followed by a doctor in training, at 1995–96 rates, total £40,447 over five years.

Medical students also receive grants and loans from public funds but data collected on maintenance awards and student loans do not distinguish between types of study. The average level of maintenance grant and student loan for full-time students eligible for awards and loans was £2,595 in 1994–95.

In addition, the national health service supports teaching of medical undergraduates on practice placements through the service increment for teaching—SIFT—levy on health authorities. The total SIFT budget for medical students in England in 1996–97 is £412 million.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimates she has made of the extent to which graduates entering medical school are more or less likely not to complete their training than non-graduate entrants. [18603]

Mr. Forth: Information on the respective rates of course completion by graduate and non-graduate entrants to medical schools is not compiled centrally.

Bradfield House School, Cullompton

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what measures her Department has taken to ensure that the Office for Standards in Education report of the inspection on 5 and 6 February 1997 of Bradfield House school, Cullompton has been circulated to those listed in section 20 (3) of the School Inspections Act 1996; [18483]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, columns *564–65*, on Bradfield House school, Cullompton what action she intends to take following the report of the Ofsted visit of February 1997 on the school; and if she will make a statement. [18506]

Mr. Robin Squire: I understand that the school received Ofsted's report on Bradfield House on 26 February 1997. The report states that Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools is of the opinion that the school requires special measures since it is failing to give pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school must now circulate the report to all parents and placing authorities in accordance with section 20 of the School Inspections Act 1996. The school is also required, by section 21 of the Act, to prepare and submit to HMCI and the Secretary of State by Monday 19 May an action plan for the recovery of the school. Officials wrote to the school on 3 March warning it that, unless confirmation is received by 7 March that it will comply with both these statutory requirements, the matter will be passed to the Treasury Solicitor for legal action to secure compliance.

The school verbally indicated on 4 March that it intends to circulate the report.

The Secretary of State also has under consideration the withdrawal of the school's approval under section 347(1) of the Education Act 1996. Her decision whether to take such action is separate from her consideration of the action plan but, in making her decision, she will have regard to all relevant factors, including the adequacy of the action plan.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 18 February, *Official Report*, column *462*, how many people have been subject to benefit disqualification for refusing a job offer notified by the Employment Service in each quarter of the last year for which figures are available. [18688]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 5 March 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about how many people have been subjected to benefit disqualification as a result of refusing a job offer notified by the Employment Service in each quarter for the last year for which figures are available. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The information you require is contained in the document entitled "Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions". Copies of this document, which is published quarterly, are held in the Library of the House. The latest published information relates to the quarter year ending 30 September 1996.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, (1) pursuant to his answer of 18 February, *Official Report*, column *462*, how many people after claiming jobseeker's allowance for a period of 13 weeks have taken jobs advertised through the jobcentre that are *(a)* part-time and *(b)* temporary; [18689]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 18 February, *Official Report*, column *462*, how many people have taken jobs advertised through the jobcentre with weekly earnings of less than £105 per week, based on a 35 hour week after claiming the jobseeker's allowance for a period of 13 weeks. [18690]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 5 March 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question pursuant to the Answer of 18th February, Official Report, column 402, regarding the number of people who after claiming Jobseeker's Allowance of a period of 13 weeks have taken jobs advertised through the Jobcentre that are (a) part-time (b) temporary and

(c) with weekly earnings of less than £105 (based on a 35 hour week). This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Unfortunately, the Employment Service does not hold this information and I am therefore unable to supply the details as outlined in your request.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful.

ENVIRONMENT

Departmental Publications

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many copies of *(a)* "This Common Inheritance" annual report 1997 and *(b)* "Climate Change, the UK Programme", were produced; at what cost; and to whom they were distributed. [17726]

Mr. Gummer: Some 3,100 copies of this year's "This Common Inheritance" report was printed. One thousand five hundred were for official use at a cost of some £22,300. Of these, 150 copies were distributed to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development; 13 to Parliament; 800 to Government Departments—including Government office for the regions and UK missions overseas, 350 to interested organisations at home; and 120 to the EU, foreign Governments and other international organisations.

Some 3,500 copies of the climate change report were printed. A total of 1,025 were for official use at a cost of some £20,000. Of these, 500 were distributed to the UN climate change secretariat, as required under the convention; 13 to Parliament; 370 to Government Departments—including UK missions overseas; 111 to consultants, agencies, industries and environment campaign groups who had helped in the production of the report or otherwise have a close interest; and 31 to the EU and other international organisations.

A few copies of each document are held by the Department of the Environment and the remainder are on sale to the general public from the Stationery Office.

UN Earth Summit II

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department has taken to involve other Government Departments in preparations for the UN's earth summit II. [18394]

Mr. Clappison: "Agenda 21", the blueprint for sustainable development agreed at the Rio earth summit, covers the activities of most Government Departments. We are, therefore, ensuring that these Departments are involved in all aspects of the preparations for the special session of the UN General Assembly in June.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will support proposals for negotiations at the UN's earth summit II on a forest convention. [18395]

Mr. Clappison: It is the Government's view that the special session of the UN General Assembly in June should be used to review progress since the Rio earth summit, and to take a forward look, seeking to renew the political momentum for achieving sustainable development. The Government believe that negotiations on a forest convention should begin as soon as possible. We want the UN General Assembly special session to endorse this.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will support proposals for negotiations on (i) a freshwater convention and (ii) a forest convention at the Earth summit II. [18497]

Mr. Clappison: The Government believe that negotiations on a forest convention should begin as soon as possible. We want the special session of the UN General Assembly to endorse this.

Negotiations on a global convention on the non-navigational uses of transboundary watercourses commenced last autumn in the sixth committee of the UN General Assembly. The proposed convention, which is the result of long work in the International Law Commission, addresses most significant aspects of freshwater. The United Kingdom supports, and is making constructive contributions to these negotiations, which are planned to resume just before Easter.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what preparations his Department is making for Earth summit II; and for the preparatory conferences leading up to the summit. [18499]

Mr. Clappison: Preparations for the special session of the UN General Assembly began in June 1996 with a seminar involving Government, business, non-governmental organisations and local government. A consultation paper was issued in December 1996, setting out the Government's approach to the special session. Comments on this are now being considered, and a revised version will be published in due course. A report setting out the United Kingdom's progress since Rio, together with some of our objectives for future action, is also being prepared for presentation to the special session. The current intersessional meeting, and the main session in April, of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development will be used to prepare the ground for the special session.

Air Pollution

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the 1997–98 charging scheme for local air pollution control under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. [18920]

Mr. Clappison: Charges to cover the costs of local enforcing authorities in regulating processes which are subject to part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 were introduced in April 1991.

With the approval of the Treasury, and following consultation with local authority associations and industry, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales have made a revised scheme specifying the scale of fees and charges to take effect from 1 April 1997.

The main changes are that the standard application fee is increased by £25 to £1,040, the substantial charge fee is increased by £15 to £665, and the annual subsistence charge is increased by £15 to £640.

In addition, an adjustment has been made to the scheme this year to introduce variable payment arrangements for operators of mobile crushing and screening plant allowing for reduced payments for multiple plant.

The scheme has been laid before both Houses and a copy placed in the Libraries.

Domestic Heating

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much more fuel it takes to heat a typical semi-detached house with *(a)* gas central heating and *(b)* non-white meter electric heating in (i) Braemar, (ii) Lerwick, (iii) Aberdeen, (iv) Edinburgh, (v) Dundee and (vi) Glasgow than a similar house in Bristol using the data contained in the climatic severity index. [18687]

Mr. Clappison: The percentage of extra fuel required to heat a typical semi-detached house with *(a)* gas central heating is estimated to be as follows for each of the specified locations:

(i) Braemar +32 per cent.

(ii) Lerwick +48 per cent.

(iii) Aberdeen +32 per cent.

(iv) Edinburgh +25 per cent.

(v) Dundee +25 per cent.

(vi) Glasgow +23 per cent.

The percentage of extra fuel required to heat a typical semi-detached house with *(b)* non-white electric heating is estimated to be as follows for each of the specified locations:

(i) Braemar +32 per cent.

(ii) Lerwick +47 per cent.

(iii) Aberdeen +32 per cent.

(iv) Edinburgh +25 per cent.

(iv) Dundee +25 per cent.

(vi) Glasgow +23 per cent.

These figures have been calculated using the Building Research Establishment domestic energy model and taking Bristol as the base case.

Rough Sleeping

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what Government funding is going to be offered in the areas invited by his Department and the Department of Health on 31 October 1996 to develop strategies to tackle rough sleeping. [19079]

Mr. Curry: The Government's aim is to ensure that there is no necessity for people to sleep rough. On 31 October last year, I announced that, following detailed evaluations in 23 areas which were co-ordinated by Shelter on contract to the Department of the Environment, funding would be offered to support expansion of the rough sleepers initiative to the London boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham and Kensington and Chelsea, and to Brighton; and that a new rough sleepers revenue fund would be made available to support local strategies drawn up jointly by local authorities and voluntary sector agencies to tackle rough sleeping in Bath, Bournemouth, Cambridge, Ealing, Exeter, Leicester, Manchester, Nottingham, Oxford and Richmond upon Thames. I have received and considered strategies from each of these areas and have reached decisions on the projects which the Government will support. My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health, has today written to each of the local authorities explaining these decisions in detail, and invitations to bid for funding will be issued shortly to voluntary sector organisations and housing associations identified in the strategies as potential providers of the services that we have agreed to fund. The Department of Health will be writing separately to local authorities about funding arrangements under the homeless mentally ill initiative.

My announcement on 31 October last year also referred to expansion of the existing central London rough sleepers initiative zones to encompass the W1 and W2 postal districts of Westminster. My Department is discussing separately with Westminster city council and local voluntary sector agencies the arrangements for this expansion, which may result in some extra funding for outreach and resettlement work.

I am pleased that each of the strategies includes existing or new projects provided by statutory and voluntary sector organisations. This local input is particularly important as a demonstration of the partnership approach that underlies the success of the rough sleepers initiative. In some areas, Government funding will be subject to clarification of the local authority housing contribution to the strategy.

This national programme of Government help is being targeted on areas where the most significant rough sleeping problems have been identified. Local authorities have an obligation to consider the housing needs of everyone residing in their areas, including people sleeping rough, and to reflect those needs in their general housing strategies. My Department has produced comprehensive guidance to enable local authorities to conduct detailed evaluations of the extent of rough sleeping in their areas and to develop effective strategies to tackle any problems that exist. The Government will consider offering funding to support local rough sleeping strategies in other areas where a major problem is identified.

I am pleased to announce that Ian Brady, deputy chief executive of homelessness charity Centrepoint, will be joining my Department on secondment to promote the development of local rough sleeping strategies, in liaison with local authorities and other voluntary sector agencies. This combination of measures is designed to ensure that there is no necessity for anyone to sleep rough in England.

Copies of my Department's letters to each of the areas being offered funding, including summaries of the strategies and the Government's response, have been placed in the Library.

DEFENCE

Cadets

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to encourage the military training of cadets. [17428]

Mr. Soames: My Department continues to support syllabuses predominantly geared to military training for the cadet forces. For the Army Cadet Force and the Air Training Corps, military training forms about 60 per cent. of the total training given to cadets. For the Sea Cadet Corps this figure is about 30 per cent. because the

emphasis on sail-training and watermanship has a more civilian, rather than military application. The RN, Army and RAF sections of the combined cadet force follow similar training syllabuses to those of their respective single service cadet forces. The remaining time is devoted to adventurous and other activities. The syllabuses for military training covers the following subjects.

Sea Cadet Corps (SCC)

Bearing and self discipline, rank and rate structure of the Royal Navy, naval customs, basic seamanship and swimming, navigation and rules of the road, maritime affairs, squad drill, arms drill, firefighting, first aid, communications.

Army Cadet Force (ACF)

Drill, turnout, military knowledge, skill at arms, use of map and compass, fieldcraft, band, first aid, life saving, canoeing, competition shooting, and self reliance training.

Air Training Corps (ATC)

RAF history, airmanship, map reading, principles of flight, basic navigation, aircraft recognition, drill, skill at arms, first aid, lifesaving, air experience flying, gliding, visits to RAF stations.

Combined Cadet Force (CCF)

The CCF contingents which are formed in schools, undertake a similar military training syllabus as laid down for their respective single-service cadet organisation.

Schools

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the average cost to his Department of the school places provided for the children of service personnel in independent and private schools in each of the last five years; [17932]

(2) how many pupils have benefited from the boarding school allowance in each of the past five years. [17931]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* The average cost of places in independent and private schools provided by my Department through the boarding school allowance scheme and special educational needs allowance in each of the last five years was as follows:

1991–92: £7,116 per place

1992–93: £7,720 per place

1993–94: £9,040 per place

1994–95: £9,438 per place

1995–96: £10,337 per place

For figures of the number of service children who have benefited from boarding school allowance, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 26 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns 195–96.

Goose Bay

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the amounts paid to the Canadian Government in each financial year from 1993–94 onwards for Royal Air Force use of the facilities at Goose bay, Labrador; what are the estimated total payments for financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98; what was the breakdown for each year into *(a)* dedicated costs and *(b)* the United Kingdom share of common costs; and what exchange rate was applicable for each year. [17990]

Mr. Soames: For financial years 1993–94 to 1996–97 the breakdown is as follows:

	Financial year			
	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*[1]1996–97*
Dedicated costs (£ million)	6.885	5.049	4.578	4.402
Common costs (£ million)	7.517	7.022	6.632	4.137
Total contribution payable to Canada (£ million)	14.402	12.071	11.210	8.539
Exchange rate £ =	C$1.96	C$2.13	C$2.14	C$2.14

[1] Estimates.

Figures shown are based on bills and estimates presented by the Canadian Government. We expect our overall costs at Goose bay to reduce slightly in financial year 1997–98.

Regiments

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is *(a)* the current establishment and *(b)* the nominal strength of (i) The Duke of Wellington's Regiment, (ii) Green Howards, (iii) Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire, (iv) The Light Infantry, (v) The Royal Dragoon Guards, (vi) The Light Dragoons and (vii) 1 Royal Tank Regiment. [18265]

Mr. Soames: The establishments and strengths are as follows:

Unit	*Establishment*	*Strength*	*Surplus/Deficit*
1st Battalion The Duke of Wellingtons Regiment	554	585	+31
1st Battalion The Green Howards	625	654	+29
1st Battalion The Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire	539	548	+9
The Light Infantry			
1st Battalion	581	553	–28
2nd Battalion	555	506	–49
The Royal Dragoon Guards	406	397	–9
The Light Dragoons	388	405	+17
1st Royal Tank Regiment	398	360	–38

Junior Leader Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report,* column *719,* how many people were made redundant as a result of the decision to close the junior leader and apprentice training site at Harrogate; what was the total cost of redundancy payments; and if he will make a statement. [18117]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* Nine non-industrial and 17 industrial personnel were made redundant. The total cost to the Ministry of Defence is £354,513, which can be broken down into £261,925, the cost for this financial year, and £92,688, the cost of the future liability for annual compensation payments which will extend over the next nine years.

A30 Improvement (Eviction of Protesters)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the involvement of armed forces personnel in the eviction of protesters on or around the route of the A30 Honiton to Exeter road improvement between 1 December 1996 and 27 February 1997. [18749]

Mr. Soames: There was no armed forces involvement in the eviction of the protesters.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Waste Management

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16427]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Department of Social Security has had an environmental strategy in place since 1992. Our environmental audits concentrate on auditing all new buildings and major refurbishment to obtain Building Research Establishment environmental assessment method accreditation.

The Department encourages use of the Environment Agency's DIY environmental performance checklist for premises management.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people are currently receiving invalidity benefit in England; [17810]

(2) how many people received sickness benefit in England in the latest week for which figures are available. [17811]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table:

	Number of incapacity benefit recipients in England at 31 August 1996
Incapacity benefit short term lower rate	94,000
Incapacity benefit short term higher rate	84,000
Incapacity benefit long term rate	1,190,000
Total	1,368,000

1. Figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the incapacity benefit computer system and rounded to the nearest thousand. Does not include a small number of cases not on the system.

2. From April 1995 sickness benefit was replaced by incapacity benefit—short-term lower rate—and invalidity benefit was replaced by incapacity benefit—short-term higher and long term rate.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of *(a)* incapacity benefit, *(b)* severe disablement allowance and *(c)* income support where a disability premium is in payment have (i) been disallowed benefits and (ii) subsequently signed on as unemployed since April 1995; what was the average duration of unemployment benefit or jobseeker's allowance; and how many of those signing on have subsequently found work. [17096]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 25 February 1997]:* Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

From April 1995 to the end of December 1996, 173,000 incapacity benefit recipients were disallowed benefit. In the same period 75,000[1] people in receipt of national insurance credits because of incapacity, most of whom received income support, were disallowed benefit. From April 1995 to the end of December 1996, 92,400 people previously in receipt of incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance and income support on the basis of incapacity for work claimed unemployment benefits.

Note:

[1] Some cases in receipt of national insurance credits only will not be included in this figure.

Social Fund

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money was lent on social fund loans at the last date for which figures are available; how many people have such loans; what is the average loan at the time of issue; what is the average repayment period; and what assessment has been made of the take-up of these loans over the past two years. [17730]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the tables:

April 1996–January 1997

	Budgeting loans	*Crisis loans*
Number of awards	767,000	644,000
Total amount awarded	£231 million	£43 million
Average payment[1]	£301	£66
Average length of repayment for loan repaid during this period	22.7 weeks	14.5 weeks

[1] Figures may not sum due to rounding.

1. The number of discretionary awards made after review is not included.

The overall performance of the social fund is constantly monitored and the results of this monitoring are used to inform the budget allocations each year.

Number of loans made over the last two years

Year	*Budgeting loan*	*Crisis loan*
1994–95	864,000	755,000
1995–96	921,000	832,000

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent review he has undertaken of the effects of the introduction of jobseeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement. [17854]

Mr. Roger Evans: In line with the Government's commitment to evaluating all new policies, we have set in place an extensive programme of monitoring and evaluation, to assess whether the jobseeker's allowance is achieving its policy objectives.

A wide-ranging evaluation is being undertaken which includes a national survey of unemployed claimants conducted before and after the introduction of the benefit.

Both the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service have an extensive monitoring programme in place to assess its implementation and performance.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received from MIND proposing changes to the housing benefit regulations; and what the proposed changes were. [18371]

Mr. Roger Evans: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has received one representation from the Coventry branch of MIND about the proposed changes to housing benefit which will restrict the amount of rent which will be used to calculate housing benefit for most single people under age 60 living in the deregulated private rented sector. This representation expressed concern that people with chronic enduring mental illness may be detrimentally affected by the proposed changes.

MIND has also made representations to the Social Security Advisory Committee on the proposed changes. The Government have just received the committee's report and will study it carefully before taking final decisions.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what analysis the Government have undertaken of the effect of *(a)* recent and *(b)* planned changes to housing benefit on people with mental health problems living within the community. [18426]

Mr. Evans: The Government are collecting data to monitor the impact of the housing benefit changes which were introduced last October. The monitoring exercise will be extended to cover future changes. The results will be analysed and will be placed in the Library. In addition, the Government are putting a series of research projects in place to evaluate the long-term effects of the changes and the use of discretionary funds to prevent exceptional hardship. The information collected will not focus specifically upon people with mental health problems. The results are expected next year.

The Government have also set up an inter-departmental review to look at the funding of supported accommodation, and as part of this exercise research is being undertaken to quantify the contribution made by housing benefit to the provision of supported accommodation for all client groups.

State Earnings-related Pensions Scheme

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates he has made of the net present value of *(a)* additional expenditure on SERPS pension and *(b)* savings made from reduced expenditure on national insurance rebates and incentives paid on contributions made to appropriate personal pensions payments in (i) 2025, (ii) 2030, (iii) 2040 and (iv) 2050, if (1) all and (2) half of those earning under £10,000 per annum currently opted out of SERPS into APPs were to rejoin SERPS. [15592]

Mr. Heald *[holding Answer 14 February 1997]:* We estimate that the net present value of additional SERPS expenditure if all holders of appropriate personal pensions—APPs—who earn under £10,000 were to join SERPS would be £110 million in 2025–26; £80 million in 2030–31; £10 million in 2040–41 and zero in 2050–51. The additional SERPS expenditure if half of those APP holders earning under £10,000 were to join SERPS is estimated at £50 million in 2025–26; £40 million in 2031–32; zero in 2040–41 and 2050–51.

We estimate that the net present value of reduced expenditure on national insurance rebates if all holders of APPs who earn under £10,000 were to join SERPS would be £170 million in 2025–26; £130 million in 2030–31; £10 million in 2040–41 and zero in 2050–51. The reduced expenditure if half of those APP holders earning under £10,000 were to join SERPS is estimated at £80 million in 2025–26; £60 million in 2031–32; £10 million in 2040–41 and zero in 2050–51.

The costings assume that those holding APPs in 1996–97 would otherwise continue as APP holders in the projected period. In addition, they are assumed to have the same real earnings in these future years as they did in the base year. All figures are expressed in 1996–97 prices, discounted.

Disability Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many medical examinations for the purpose of the all work test were carried out in November 1996 by doctors who were members of disability appeal tribunals. [13325]

Mr. Roger Evans *[pursuant to his reply 30 January, Official Report, c 362-63]:* In November 1996, 2,399 all work test examinations were conducted doctors undertaking work for Benefits Agency medical services on a fee-paid sessional basis who are also members of disability appeal tribunals.

Sources:

Independent Tribunal Service

Benefits Agency Medical Services.

Note:

Data are provisional and subject to change.

SCOTLAND

Water and Sewerage Services

15. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for the future management of the water and sewerage services in Scotland. [17327]

Mr. Kynoch: The new structure for water and sewerage services which we have put in place is designed to be durable and efficient.

Scottish Grand Committee

16. **Sir Ralph Howell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what role he plans for the Secretary of State for Scotland at future meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee. [17328]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I will ensure that the Scottish Grand Committee continues to bring government closer to the Scottish people and make it more accountable to them.

21. **Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the work of the Scottish Grand Committee over the last year. [17334]

Mr. Forsyth: In the last year the Scottish Grand Committee has assumed a pivotal role in making government more accountable to the Scottish people and strengthening the Union.

30. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the contribution of the Scottish Grand Committee to the accountability of his Department. [17344]

Mr. Forsyth: The Scottish Grand Committee is a powerful Committee of this House. Its enhanced role has ensured closer scrutiny and accountability of the work of my Department.

Unemployment

17. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss the unemployment situation in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [17329]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend meets representatives of the Scottish Trades Union Congress from time to time to discuss a range of issues. There are no current plans for a meeting.

29. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the level of unemployment in Scotland. [17343]

Mr. Kynoch: The seasonally adjusted level of unemployment in Scotland has fallen by more than 24,100 since April 1996 and is well below the European Union average.

Shipbuilding

18. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to ensure the future of commercial shipbuilding in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Govan. [17330]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has taken a close interest in the commercial success of the shipbuilding industry in every part of Scotland. This has included promoting the interests of the industry and, where appropriate, drawing attention to the continued excellence of these shipyards and the great progress in their productivity, working practices and labour relations.

Employment Trends

19. **Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Scottish trades Union Congress to discuss employment trends in the public sector in Scotland. [17332]

Mr. Kynoch: I met STUC representatives on 11 February this year to discuss local government employment issues. I meet the general secretary of the STUC regularly.

Economy (North Ayrshire)

20. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current economic prospects in north Ayrshire. [17333]

Mr. Kynoch: The economic prospects in North Ayrshire remain good. Unemployment in the North Ayrshire council area fell by 6.7 per cent. in the year to January 1997.

Islands Needs Allowance

22. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss the second stage of the special islands needs allowance review. [17335]

Mr. Kynoch: We are committed to beginning a review of the special islands needs allowance later this year once expenditure data from all of the new councils is available.

Glenmore

23. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received regarding plans for *(a)* a gondola and *(b)* a funicular railway at Glenmore in the Cairngorms. [17336]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has received seven letters about the Cairngorm funicular railway since 1 January. Four opposed the development while one was dismissive of a gondola as an alternative.

Local Government Finance

24. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the impact on the manpower of Scottish local authorities of the revenue support grant settlement for 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [17337]

Mr. Kynoch: Provided councils maximise the benefits from the reorganisation and efficiency savings, and budget in line with the priorities my right hon. Friend set in determining the settlement, it should lead to a continued improvement in front-line services.

26. **Mr. Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest assessment of the economic consequences of his policy towards non-domestic rates in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [17340]

Mr. Kynoch: Ratepayers have saved more than £1.4 billion in the past 5 years. If the Government had not harmonised rating, next year's bills would be at least double their current levels. We are further freezing the business rates for all small businesses in 1997–98; direct support in that year alone will total over £170 million.

The success of the policy is clear. In the last decade the number of companies registered in Scotland has increased by almost 14,000. Business births in Scotland continue to exceed business deaths.

This is good news for Scottish business.

33. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received on the projected level of local government expenditure in the highlands. [17347]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about this matter.

34. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received on local government finance. [17348]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on this matter.

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the recent Coopers and Lybrand report on local government spending in Scotland. [17321]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The report confirms that after adjustments for non-comparability Scottish councils are spending £285 more each year for every man, woman and child than English councils are spending and £181 more than Welsh councils are spending.

I now intend to start the next stage of the study to find out whether there is any justification for this excess.

Teaching Posts

25. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what will be the change in the number of teaching posts in *(a)* Glasgow and *(b)* Scotland in 1997–98. [17339]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Any change in the number of teaching posts will reflect local authority decisions.

Flood Prevention

27. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the successful bids for challenge funding to aid flood prevention projects. [17341]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has today announced details of successful central challenge fund bids, including those dealing with flood prevention. East Ayrshire council will receive £1.9 million for early action works to alleviate flooding risk in the Kilmarnock area and Perth and Kinross council will receive a total of £18.3 million over the next five years, subject to the Perth flood prevention scheme being confirmed.

28. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for introducing a flood management scheme for the whole of the River Tay catchment area. [17342]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has no such proposals. Local councils have powers under the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961 to prevent or mitigate flooding of non-agricultural land in their areas. The Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill currently going through Parliament will, if enacted, ensure that local authorities address their responsibilities for flood prevention.

Dumfries and Galloway Health Board

31. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the amount of money made available to the Dumfries and Galloway health board in each of the last three years. [17345]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The amount of money made available to Dumfries and Galloway health board was £121.306 million in 1994–95, £127.695 million and £131.803 million in 1996–97.

Scottish Enterprise

32. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met Scottish Enterprise to discuss trends in the Scottish economy. [17346]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend and I have regular contact with Scottish Enterprise.

Clinical Services

35. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the Government's policy regarding the privatisation of national health service clinical services in Scotland. [17349]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government are committed to a national health service delivered on the basis of clinical need, largely free at the point of delivery, and funded from taxation. The private finance initiative enables modern facilities to be provided sooner than would otherwise be possible.

The Government have consistently made it clear that they will not approve any project under the private finance initiative that includes clinical services unless it has the support of local clinicians and management.

Income Tax

36. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the mechanisms required for the introduction of a separate system of income taxation in Scotland. [17350]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Dover. (Mr. Shaw).

Electronic Tagging

37. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the outcome of the electronic tagging of persistent offenders in a pilot project in Norfolk; and if he will make a statement on the implications for Scotland. [17352]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The pilot project in Norfolk and those in Manchester and Berkshire have been evaluated by the Home Office. The findings seem to confirm that the technology is reliable and that this form of sentence can be a worthwhile addition to the range of community penalties available to sentencers. There is no reason to believe that the same will not be true in Scotland.

Felling Licence (Balblair)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what advice the Forestry Commission received from the local authority and Scottish Natural Heritage prior to approving a felling licence for woodland at Balblair; and if he will publish the advice; [17487]

(2) when he was consulted by the Forestry Commission prior to the issue of a licence to fell woodlands at Balblair. [17488]

Mr. Kynoch: The Forestry Commission has not approved any felling at Balblair and so it has not issued a felling licence. The commission did receive an application for the woodland grant scheme which included proposals for felling, but this was withdrawn by the applicant before the commission had concluded its consultations with Scottish Natural Heritage and the local authority.

Prison Population

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the Scottish prison population by type of offence numerically and in percentage terms. [17696]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of this question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mrs. Ray Michie, dated 5 March 1997:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about providing information on the Scottish prison population by type of offence.

Information by offence type is not currently available in relation to the average daily prison population. However, the table attached provides reception information by main offence for the year 1995.

Receptions to penal establishments by main crime/offence, 1995

Scotland *Number and percentage*

Crime/offence	*Direct receptions*		*Fine default receptions*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Total crime and offences	11,502	100	7,509	100
Total crimes: sub total	8,145	71	3,261	43
Non-sexual crimes of violence: sub total	1,271	11	145	2
Homicide	75	1	4	'—
Serious assault and attempted murder	747	6	77	1
Handling offensive weapons	150	1	41	1
Robbery	265	2	16	'—
Other	34	'—	7	'—
Crimes of indecency: sub total	224	2	148	2
Sexual assault	64	1	3	'—
Lewd and ibidinous practices	131	1	2	'—
Other	29	'—	143	2
Crimes of dishonesty: sub total	5,320	46	2,188	29
Housebreaking	1,634	14	457	6
Theft by opening lockfast places	438	4	161	2
Theft of a motor-vehicle	514	4	141	2
Other theft	2,039	18	1,049	14
Fraud	174	2	133	2
Other	521	5	247	3
Fire-raising, vandalism etc: sub total	136	1	207	3
Fire-raising	31	'—	3	'—
Vandalism etc.	105	1	204	3
Other crimes: sub total	1,194	10	573	8
Crimes against public justice	492	4	276	4
Drugs related crimes	685	6	284	4
Other	17	'—	13	'—
Total offences: sub total	3,357	29	4,248	57
Miscellaneous offences: sub total	2,369	21	2,649	35
Petty assault	672	6	417	6
Breach of the peace	1,606	14	2,008	27
Drunkenness	11	'—	58	1
Other	80	1	166	2
Motor vehicle offences: sub total	988	9	1,599	21
Dangerous and careless driving	61	1	64	1
Drunk driving	185	2	261	3

Receptions to penal establishments by main crime/offence, 1995

Scotland *Number and percentage*

Crime/offence	*Direct receptions*		*Fine default receptions*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Speeding	5	[1]—	24	[1]—
Unlawful use of vehicle	725	6	1,167	16
Vehicle defect offences	2	[1]—	15	[1]—
Other	10	[1]—	68	1

[1] Denotes less than 0.5 per cent.

Community Councils

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) for what reasons the community councils abolished on 31 March 1997 will not re-convene until July; [18006]

(2) what arrangements he is making for the discharge of the functions of the community councils in Scotland in the period between 31 March and July 1997; [18007]

(3) what guidance has been given to community councils about their (i) planning functions, (ii) representation on external bodies, (iii) financial and other contractual commitments and (iv) funding for local projects during the period between 31 March and July 1997; [18008]

(4) what notice was given to existing community councils about their period of non-existence; and what legal advice has been given about continuing duties and responsibilities of existing members while the community councils are disbanded. [18009]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 3 March 1997]:* The operation of community council schemes is entirely the responsibility of the relevant local authority. I understand that Scottish Borders council has decided to revoke the existing community council schemes within its area on 31 March and subsequently to adopt a new scheme. It is for Scottish Borders council to justify to the people it serves the length of any period of interregnum between the dissolution of community councils under its existing schemes and the election of new community councils under its proposed new scheme. It is also for the council to consider any interim arrangements for seeking the views of the community.

I hope that Scottish Borders council will very carefully re-examine whether the length of interregnum that it proposes is really necessary.

Nutritional Standards

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those health boards and local authorities which have agreed nutritional specifications and standards of quality for contracts. [17373]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not collected centrally.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment he has made of the extent to which food provided in child care facilities for under-fives meets his Department's dietary targets; [17374]

(2) what assessment he has made of the extent to which food provided in *(a)* schools and *(b)* hospitals (i) provides adequate nutrition and (ii) takes account of cultural and religious requirements. [17416]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Responsibility for the provision of food in schools and in child care facilities for the under-fives rests with local authorities. It is for these authorities to determine and review the nature of the food to be provided and its nutritional value.

Scottish health service trusts are responsible for the provision of food in hospitals. Each trust is required to have in place food and dietary policies which offer patients a choice of food of a high quality and nutritional value and which meets, as appropriate, the specific cultural and religious requirements of patients.

The Scottish diet action plan, "Eating for Health", which was published by the Government in July 1996, contains a set of model nutritional guidelines for catering specifications for the public sector in Scotland. The plan recommends that the guidelines should be taken into account by all public sector bodies in determining the specification and standards in their catering contracts. The action plan and the guidelines have been distributed widely, and all directors of education and Scottish health service boards and trust hospitals received copies.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will estimate the minimum weekly cost of the good required for a healthy diet for *(a)* an adult male and *(b)* an adult female; [17375]

(2) what steps his Department takes to encourage local initiatives to improve access to a range of healthy food at reasonable prices in low income areas; [17417]

(3) if he will make a statement on the *(a)* role of and *(b)* resources allocated to the national project officer charged with implementing the diet action plan for Scotland. [17418]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: "Eating for Health - A Diet Action Plan for Scotland", which I launched in July 1996, set a framework for action to improve the Scottish diet over the next 10 years.

Among its 71 recommendations was the appointment of a national project officer to facilitate a strategic approach to dietary improvement in low income communities, including the development of new initiatives in both urban and rural areas to aid access to healthy foods. The officer was appointed last October, under the auspices of the Scottish Consumer Council, with funding from the Scottish Office. Resources totalling more than £1 million are being made available over this and the next two financial years to take forward initiatives flowing from the action plan. Of this amount, £115,000

has been specifically earmarked in the current year to find the national project officer post and initiatives associated with it.

The Scottish Office is also continuing to support local initiatives through the urban programme, and three projects promoting healthy eating in urban areas are currently being funded. Dietary issues in low-income communities are also being addressed under programmes for partnership, the current urban regeneration policy framework. This work is complemented by the activities of health alliances, now established in every health board area, for which the action plan envisaged an expanding role in stimulating and supporting community activity.

The weekly cost of a healthy diet will vary according to individual choice and circumstance; but healthy eating does not necessarily mean a more expensive food bill. The action plan recommends that supermarkets should examine, in consultation with the national project officer, the feasibility of measures to improve the availability of healthy products to low income communities. This is a point my right hon. Friend and I will be discussing with senior representatives of the major retailers at a meeting later this month.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action his Department has taken, since the publication of a diet action plan for Scotland, to stimulate consumer demand for fruit and vegetables; and what progress has been made towards the targets for consumption of fruit and vegetables. [17376]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As recommended in the Scottish diet action plan, "Eating for Health", the Health Education Board for Scotland is currently distributing a maildrop on healthy eating to every household in Scotland. This stresses the positive benefits of fruit and vegetables in protecting against a number of serious diseases, and encourages increased consumption in line with the dietary targets.

The Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Environment Department has also recently adjusted the criteria pertinent to its food processing and marketing grant schemes so that preference is given to initiatives which produce healthy foods, including fruit and vegetables.

Progress towards the dietary targets set in 1994 will be measured primarily through the recently introduced Scottish health survey. The first data from the survey will be available in the spring and will provide a baseline against which changes in the populations's dietary behaviour, including consumption of fruit and vegetables, can be measured.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the health boards and local authorities who have indicated their commitment to implement the recommendations contained in the diet action plan for Scotland and nutrition targets. [17377]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: "Eating for Health—A Diet Action Plan for Scotland" was issued to all health boards and local authorities on publication last July. It has been widely welcomed by the Scottish health service. A conference organised jointly by The Scottish Office, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Health Education Board for Scotland on public health in September 1996 indicated a high degree of commitment and support among local authorities for the recommendations in the plan.

Meat Hygiene Inspectors

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many meat hygiene inspectors were employed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Meat Hygiene Service (i) on the most recent date available and (ii) for each year since 1979. [18164]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: No meat hygiene inspectors were employed by the Department. The chief executive of the Meat Hygiene Service has been asked to write to the hon. Member regarding their staffing numbers.

Scientists

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many food and agriculture scientists were employed on Government-funded projects at ADAS establishments by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18179]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: On 1 March 1997, there were no food and agriculture scientists employed on Scottish Office-funded projects in ADAS establishments. On 31 March 1995, one part-time scientist was employed on a Scottish Office-funded project at ADAS.

Data in respect of earlier years is no longer held centrally.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many food and agriculture scientists were employed on Government-funded projects at the Agriculture and Food Research Council and the Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council establishments by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18180]

Mr. Robertson: On 1 March 1997, 2.05 full-time equivalent food and agricultural scientists were employed on Scottish Office-funded projects in BBSRC establishments. On 31 March 1995, two full-time equivalent food and agriculture scientists were employed on Scottish Office-funded projects in BBSRC establishments.

Data in respect of earlier years are no longer held centrally.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many food and agriculture scientists were employed on Government-funded projects at the Central Science Laboratory by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18169]

Mr. Robertson: On 1 March 1997, 0.7 full-time equivalent food and agriculture scientists at the Central Science Laboratory were employed on a Scottish Office-funded project. There were no food and agriculture scientists employed at CSL on Scottish Office-funded projects on 31 March 1995.

Data in respect of earlier years is no longer held centrally.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many scientists were employed on Government-funded projects at the Institute of Food Research by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18171]

Mr. Robertson: Since 31 March 1995, there have been no scientists working on Scottish Office-funded projects at the Institute of Food Research.

Data in respect of earlier years is no longer held centrally.

Research and Development Expenditure

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the Department's total research and development expenditure for each year from 1980 to the present in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices on projects funded by his Department equivalent to those covered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. [18176]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Scottish Office funding of agricultural and fisheries research complements the agricultural and fisheries research funded by MAFF and the Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council. There are a number of co-ordination mechanisms in place to ensure that research is not duplicated.

Total Scottish Office research and development expenditure on agricultural and fisheries is set out in the table. Figures are only available from 1981–82 to 1995–96. Figures for 1981–82 to 1992–93 are taken from the "Annual Review of Government-funded Research and Development" for each year. Figures from 1993–94 to 1995–96 are taken from the "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology" for each year.

£ million

Year	*Cash*	*Constant prices (1995–96)*
1981–82	36.2	71.5
1982–83	38.1	70.2
1983–84	41.3	72.7
1984–85	44.1	74.0
1985–96	44.6	70.9
1986–87	42.5	65.6
1987–88	41.2	60.4
1988–89	43.3	59.5
1989–90	45.6	58.6
1990–91	47.9	56.9
1991–92	48.0	53.6
1992–93	50.7	54.4
1993–94	50.8	52.9
1994–95	52.2	53.5
1995–96	49.5	49.5

Veterinary Surgeons

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many veterinary surgeons were employed by his Department and on projects funded by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March for each year since 1979. [18163]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Scottish Office employs no veterinary surgeons. Veterinary advice is provided by MAFF vets, five of whom currently advise the Scottish Office. There were 12 veterinary surgeons employed on projects funded by the Scottish Office at 1 March 1997.

Data in respect of earlier years is no longer held centrally.

Veterinary Scientists

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many veterinary scientists were employed on Government-funded projects at the Central Veterinary Laboratory by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18170]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: There have been no veterinary scientists employed at the Central Veterinary Laboratory on projects funded by the Scottish Office since 31 March 1995.

Data in respect of earlier years are no longer held centrally.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the income scale that will apply to the assisted places scheme in Scotland in school session 1997–98. [19078]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: For school session 1997–98, I propose to lay regulations before the House in due course providing for progressive parental contribution for one assisted pupil in relation to family income as follows:

Part of relevant income to which the specified percentage applies	*Parental contribution (percentage)*
That part, if any, which exceeds £9,969 but does not exceed £10,864	9
That part, if any, which exceeds £10,864 but does not exceed £11,725	12
That part, if any, which exceeds £11,725 but does not exceed £13,481	15
That part, if any which exceeds £13,481 but does not exceed £16,186	21
That part, if any, which exceeds £16,186 but does not exceed £19,712	24
That part, if any, which exceeds £19,712	33

The relevant income scale is open-ended, but the remission can, of course, be given only where the parental contribution is less than the school tuition fee. We do not expect the income scale adjustment to have a significant effect on the proportion of pupils who receive full remission of their fees, currently standing at 47.4 per cent. of the 3,539 pupils assisted in the 1996–97 school session.

Mr. Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has determined the level of fee remission grant which will be available to parents under the assisted places scheme in school session 1997–98. [19080]

Mr. Robertson: Independent schools offer a wider choice and diversity of education with strong traditions of academic attainment, good examination results, sound discipline and a commitment to a wide range of sport and extra curricular activities.

The assisted places scheme provides financial assistance towards tuition fees and certain other costs for children from low income families who would otherwise have not been able to afford the cost of an independent school education for their children. In the current 1996–97 school session, 48 per cent. of the 3,500 pupils being assisted under the scheme come from families whose gross income is less than £9,873 per annum; with 75 per cent. of those pupils coming from families earning £16,000 or less per annum. The assisted places scheme has, since it was introduced in 1981, enabled over 11,000 children from families with low incomes to attend Scottish independent schools.

My right hon. Friend is making £14,131,000 available for fee remission in the 1997–98 school session in response to applications for funds from the 53 schools across Scotland which will participate in the scheme. The table sets out the allocation of fee remission grants to individual schools for the 1997–98 school session. It will be for each participating school to fund as many assisted places as can be afforded from within these allocated amounts, but we estimate that this total should be sufficient to fund around 3,800 places in the 1997–98 school session, maintaining our commitment to the expansion of the scheme.

Assisted places scheme 1997–1998 allocation of fee remission grant

School	*Proposed allocation (£)*
Aberlour School	52,000
Albyn School	125,000
Ardvreck School	38,000
Beaconhurst School	110,000
Belhaven Hill School	30,000
Belmont House School	167,000
Butterstone School	33,000
Cademuir International School	5,000
Cargilfield School	29,000
Clifton Hall School	40,000
Craigclowan School	38,000
Craigholme School	168,000
Croftinloan School	61,000
Dollar Academy	284,000
Edinburgh Academy	351,000
Fernhill School	103,000
Fettes College	273,000
George Heriot's School	795,000
George Watson's College	860,000
Glasgow Academy	245,000
Glenalmond College	397,000
Gordonstoun School	213,000
Hamilton College	96,000
High School of Dundee	795,000
High School of Glasgow	174,000
Hutchesons' Grammar School	641,000
Keil School	281,000
Kelvinside Academy	475,000
Kilgraston School	355,000
Lathallan School	34,000
Laurel Park School	600,000
Lomond School	285,000
Loretto School	250,000
Merchiston Castle School	400,000
Morrison's Academy	578,000
New School, Butterstone	28,000
New Park School	35,000
Park Lodge School	24,000
Rannoch School	225,000
Robert Gordon's College	265,000
Rudolf Steiner School, Edinburgh	336,000
St. Aloysius College	583,000
St. Columba's School	130,000
St. Denis and Cranley School	158,000
St. George School	257,000
St. Leonard's School	240,000
St. Margaret's School, Aberdeen	62,000
St. Margaret's School, Edinburgh	336,000
St. Mary's School, Melrose	36,000
Stewart's Melville College and the Mary Erskine School	1,300,000
Strathallan School	353,000
Wellington School	382,000
Total	14,131,000

HEALTH

Emergency Beds

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of emergency beds in NHS hospitals during *(a)* the current winter and *(b)* the winter of 1995–96; and what measures he is taking, or has taken, to ensure availability when required. [18458]

Mr. Horam: In the national health service, use of beds is not necessarily limited to either emergency or elective patients and therefore the number of "emergency beds" is not recorded centrally.

The most recent information on acute bed availability can be found in "Bed Availability for England 1995–96", copies of which can be found in the Library.

Admissions

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* medical emergency admissions and *(b)* elective surgical admissions there were for each month since April 1995. [18608]

Mr. Horam: Information for 1995–96 will be available later this year.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS elective admissions have been cancelled because of emergency demand for NHS hospital facilities in the last 12 months; and how many private patient admissions to NHS pay beds have been cancelled in the same period for the same reason. [18611]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Cancelled operations

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients had their operations cancelled and were not re-admitted within 30 days for each month since April 1995. [18607]

Mr. Horam: The information available is provided in quarterly returns which are available in the Library.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS theatre sessions were cancelled in each month since April 1995. [18606]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Doctors

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors ceased practice in each of the last five years. [18605]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not held centrally.

Cancer Patients

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of terminally ill patients with cancer in acute hospital beds in the latest period for which figures are available.[18730]

Mr. Horam: None.

Accident and Emergency Services

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of private hospitals provide full accident and emergency services. [18713]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Breast Screening

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of women aged 50 years have had breast screening, broken down by *(a)* district health authority and *(b)* regional health authority. [18731]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Cryptosporidium

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department was first notified of the outbreak of cryptosporidium in the area of Thames Water; and by whom. [18908]

Mr. Horam: The local consultant in communicable disease control for Brent and Harrow health authority informed officials of an increase in the number of reported cases of cryptosporidiosis in the area on the afternoon of Friday 28 February. Later the same afternoon, the regional epidemiologist reported an outbreak of the infection in West Hertfordshire.

Operation Waiting List

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women are waiting for *(a)* a hysterectomy operation, *(b)* a mastectomy operation and *(c)* a hip replacement operation in each health authority area; and how many have been waiting longer than (i) three, (ii) six, (iii) nine and (iv) 12 months. [18788]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available. Information collected centrally is at specialty level and does not distinguish between male and female patients.

Mental Health

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations the Government have received regarding the effects of the provisions of the Finance Bill on people with mental health problems living within the community; and if he will make a statement on those effects. [18370]

Mr. Burns: The Government receive numerous representations from a wide range of interested parties on the provisions of the Finance Bill. Improving the care of mentally ill people is a high priority for the Government and considerable resources have been spent in recent years in pursuit of this aim. We recently announced the allocation of an extra £50 million to help health and local authorities improve further the quality and range of services they provide to mentally ill people.

Unlicensed Medicines

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the medicines currently available that are not licensed for human administration. [18593]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Unlicensed medicines may be manufactured or imported for supply to the order of a doctor or dentist for their individual patients.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what medicines currently given to children are administered by a route, in a formulation or in a dosage which has not been approved by the Medicines Control Agency. [18594]

Mr. Malone: When medicines are administered to children by a route, in a formulation or in a dosage which has not been approved for that age group by the Medicines Control Agency, this occurs outside the terms and conditions of the medicinal product licence and is the responsibility of the prescribing physician. Such usage is not reported to the Medicines Control Agency.

Broadmoor Special Hospital

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the powers and responsibilities of the patients council at Broadmoor; and if he will make a statement. [18691]

(2) what plans he has to investigate allegations of *(a)* child abuse, *(b)* access to pornographic materials and *(c)* sexual assault in Broadmoor hospital. [18693]

Mr. Burns: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health gave the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) on 3 March 1997, *Official Report*, column *451*.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to improve staff morale at Broadmoor hospital; and if he will make a statement. [18692]

Mr. Burns: Staffing issues at Broadmoor hospital are a matter for the hospital authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Broadmoor hospital, Mrs. Sheila Drew-Smith.

Recombinant Factor 8

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will establish funding provision for recombinant factor 8 on an equivalent basis to that provided in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [18720]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on 23 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *216–17*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, for what reasons the vaccination of poultry against Newcastle disease is normally prohibited in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [17242]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* Vaccination against Newcastle disease has been prohibited in Northern Ireland until recently because the Province's status as a non-vaccinating area has permitted the prohibition of poultry—other than eggs and day-old chicks—from vaccinating countries. That has helped to prevent the introduction of other poultry diseases from which Northern Ireland has been free. Vaccination also makes it technically difficult to detect and diagnose Newcastle disease if it does occur.

Action for Community Employment (Staff Reductions)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he plans to take to protect the continuing services of *(a)* youth clubs, *(b)* pre-school playgroups, *(c)* organisations working with the elderly, *(d)* environmental groups, *(e)* disabled organisations and *(f)* other voluntary or community groups, affected by the reduction in the number of ACE employees. [17706]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. Seamus Mallon, dated 5 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, to reply to your question about continuing services to groups in the community affected by the reduction in the Action for Community Employment (ACE) scheme.

The essential purpose of ACE is to enable long-term unemployed participants to compete more effectively for available permanent jobs. The community benefit of ACE to a secondary aim. However, Baroness Denton wishes to minimise the effect of the reductions on the community and has asked the Agency to give priority to protecting services to needy and vulnerable people. Accordingly, we wrote on 7 February to ACE projects giving guidance on preserving priority services to the elderly, under 5's, the disabled and ill. Services to youth clubs and environmental groups are not included as priorities.

The management committees of ACE schemes have been asked to take particular care when reducing places to try and ensure that needy people are not suddenly deprived of essential services on which they have come to depend. The Agency is also encouraging ACE schemes, wherever possible, to work with neighbouring schemes to preserve services.

I can assure you that the Agency will continue to work with schemes to minimise the impact of the reduction.

Punishment Shootings

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many assaults described as punishment shootings have taken place in Northern Ireland in each year since 1991 and in 1997 to date; and how many were believed in each year to have been carried out by the *(a)* Provisional IRA, *(b)* other terrorist groups, *(c)* the Ulster Defence Association, *(d)* the Ulster Volunteer Force and *(e)* other loyalist paramilitary organisations. [18686]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* Casualties as a result of terrorist assaults (shootings) are as follows:

Year	*By loyalist groups*	*By republican groups*	*Total*
1991	40	36	76
1992	72	61	133
1993	60	25	85
1994	68	54	122
1995	3	0	3
1996	21	3	24
1997 (to 2 March)	11	1	12

It is not possible to specify which individual group carried out an offence.

Meat Hygiene Inspectors

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many hygiene inspectors were employed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Meat Hygiene Service (i) on the most recent date available and (ii) in each year since 1979. [18167]

Mr. Ancram: It is possible to provide only details of the numbers of staff employed by the Department of Agriculture from each year since 1990. To provide details for earlier years would incur disproportionate costs.

(a) Meat inspectors employed by the Department of Agriculture

February 1997: 132

March 1996: 118

March 1995: 118

March 1994: 129

March 1993: 133

March 1992: 136

March 1991: 134

March 1990: 143

(b) There is not a separate meat hygiene service in Northern Ireland.

Food and Agriculture Scientists

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many food and agriculture scientists were employed in Government-funded food and science establishments by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18182]

Mr. Ancram: In addition to the number of food and agriculture scientists employed by the Department, details of which were given to him in a response earlier today, the following food and agriculture scientists are employed by ARINI—the Agricultural Research Institute of Northern Ireland:

February 1997: 46

March 1995: 51

March 1990: 39

The information was provided by ARINI who have advised that in the time available it was not possible to provide information for earlier years. They have further advised that up to 1990 the food and agriculture scientists employed by ARINI would have worked solely on projects funded by the Department. However, since then there has been an increase in commercial research which required a commensurate increase in scientific staff. In the time available it has not been possible to sub-divide the number of staff into those working on projects funded by the Department and those working on commercially funded projects.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many food and agriculture scientists were employed on Government-funded projects at the Agriculture and Food Research Council and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council establishments by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18184]

Mr. Ancram: The Department does not employ staff at either establishment.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many food and agriculture scientists were employed on Government-funded projects at ADAS establishments by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18183]

Mr. Ancram: The Department does not employ staff at ADAS establishments.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many food and agriculture scientists were employed on Government-funded projects at the Central Science Laboratory by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18185]

Mr. Ancram: The Department does not employ staff at the Central Science Laboratory.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many scientists were employed on Government-funded projects at the Institute of Food Research by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available, and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18187]

Mr. Ancram: The Department does not employ staff at the Institute of Food Research.

Veterinary Surgeons

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many veterinary surgeons were employed by his Department on projects funded by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March in each year since 1979. [18166]

Mr. Ancram: The Department of Agriculture employs veterinary surgeons for a variety of tasks including disease prevention, control and eradication, meat hygiene and veterinary research. The figure in the table indicates the breakdown between veterinary research and other duties.

It is possible to provide details only of the numbers of veterinary surgeons employed in each year since 1990. To provide details for earlier years would incur disproportionate costs.

Veterinary research

February 1997: 26

March 1996: 26

March 1995: 26

March 1994: 27

March 1993: 27

March 1992: 25

March 1991: 28

March 1990: 21

Veterinary service

February 1997: 138

March 1996: 136

March 1995: 143

March 1994: 151

March 1993: 144

March 1992: 129

March 1991: 111

March 1990: 111

Veterinary Scientists

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many veterinary scientists were employed on Government funded projects at the Central Veterinary Laboratory by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18186]

Mr. Ancram: The Department does not employ any veterinary scientists at the Central Veterinary Laboratory.

Scientific Establishments

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those scientific establishments other than the Central Science Laboratory, Central Veterinary Laboratory and the Institute of Food Research receiving funding from his Department indicating the number of scientists employed at each on projects funded by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18188]

Mr. Ancram: The only scientific establishment outside of the Department which receives funding from the Department is the Agriculture Research Institute of Northern Ireland. For details of the number of scientists employed by that institute, I refer the hon. Member to answer to him on that subject today.

Research and Development Expenditure

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the Department's total research and development expenditure for each year from 1980 to the present in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices on projects funded by his Department on matters equivalent to those covered by MAFF. [18181]

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, research and development expenditure:

Year	*Cash*	*Constant prices (1995–96 financial year) £ million*
1979–80	3.59	9.11
1980–81	4.93	10.74
1981–82	5.20	10.18
1982–83	5.75	10.50
1983–84	6.09	10.63
1984–85	6.44	10.70
1985–86	7.02	11.00
1986–87	7.50	11.40
1987–88	8.00	11.70
1988–89	7.50	10.34
1989–90	7.89	10.09
1990–91	8.31	9.69
1991–92	8.75	9.74
1992–93	8.85	9.55
1993–97	8.75	9.28
1994–95	8.62	8.90
1995–96	8.65	8.65
1996–97	n/a	—

n/a = not available. Data for years prior to 1991–92 are estimates.

Local Government Finance

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each council in Northern Ireland (i) the electorate, (ii) the population and (iii) the council debt *(a)* in total, *(b)* per head of electorate, *(c)* per head of the total population and *(d)* as a percentage of annual income at the latest date for which figures are available. [18516]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is set out in the table.

Council	*Electorate mid summer 1995*	*Population mid summer 1995*	*Total council debt for 1995–98* £	*Council debt per head of electorate* £	*Council debt per head of civilian population* £	*Total council debt as percentage of annual income for 1995–96*
Antrim	31,793	46,400	6,654,277.00	209.30	143.41	134.77
Ards	51,050	66,700	9,982,147.00	195.54	149.66	131.32
Armagh	37,454	52,400	7,943,190.00	212.08	151.59	152.91
Ballymena	43,135	57,400	6,418,230.00	148.79	111.82	133.23
Ballymoney	18,107	24,600	1,697,563.00	93.75	69.01	70.54
Banbridge	27,644	37,300	4,991,104.00	180.55	133.81	127.08
Belfast	204,641	296,300	32,629,900.00	159.45	110.12	57.68
Carrickfergus	25,938	34,900	4,246,926.00	163.73	121.69	105.99
Casilereagh	48,825	63,400	9,382,079.00	192.16	147.98	164.36
Coleraine	38,231	54,100	7,948,121.00	207.90	146.92	123.39
Cookstown	22,229	31,300	280,440.00	12.62	8.96	10.29
Craigavon	55,432	77,900	11,401,098.00	205.68	146.36	121.98
Derry	66,604	101,700	17,528,766.00	263.18	172.36	117.56
Down	42,297	60,000	5,388,249.00	127.39	89.80	73.90
Dungannon	33,127	46,100	1,156,761.00	34.92	25.09	28.10
Fermanagh	40,335	54,700	1,457,629.00	36.14	26.65	27.36
Larne	22,765	30,000	4,593,901.00	201.80	153.13	125.67
Limavady	20,184	30,100	2,940,431.00	145.68	97.69	98.45
Lisburn	72,584	103,600	4,775,926.00	65.80	46.10	51.53
Magherarfelt	26,336	37,000	609,261.00	23.13	16.47	17.37
Moyle	10,939	14,800	1,391,429.00	127.20	94.02	80.46
Newry and Mourne	58,647	83,500	15,686,535.00	267.47	187.86	177.45
Newtonabbey	57,187	78,600	14,060,530.00	245.87	178.89	150.25
North Down	56,062	73,000	16,032,743.00	285.98	219.63	168.73
Omagh	31,806	46,200	7,245,187.00	227.79	156.82	148.65
Strabane	26,001	36,100	3,355,454.00	129.05	92.95	82.51
Total	1,169,353	1,638,100	199,797,877.00			

WALES

Cold-related Illnesses

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many people in Wales received treatment by NHS doctors for cold-related illnesses for the period December 1996 and January 1997; and what was the average figure for similar periods in the past 10 years; [17220]

(2) what have been the excess winter treatment rates for cold-related illnesses in hospitals in Wales for *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients for each of the last 10 years; [17213]

(3) how many people in Wales received hospital treatment as *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients, for cold-related illnesses for the periods December 1996 and January 1997; and what was the average figure for similar periods in the past 10 years. [17217]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information concerning the illnesses for which people are treated by general medical practitioners or as out-patients in NHS hospitals is not available centrally. Information on the number of in-patients treated in NHS hospitals during December 1996 and January 1997 is not yet available. However, information relating to the number of in-patient admissions with cold related illnesses in each of the last 10 years for which data are available is given in the following table:

Number of in-patient admissions by primary diagnosis

	Hypothermia	*Influenza*	*Pneumonia*	*Bronchitis*
December 1985	29	26	401	361
January 1986	13	9	458	400
Total for 1985–86	156	167	3,814	2,870
December 1986	32	8	354	326
January 1987	7	9	371	325
Total for 1986–87	112	77	3,501	2,452
December 1987	13	14	357	352
January 1988	15	5	386	403
Total for 1987–88	93	73	3,769	2,568
December 1988	5	14	342	280
January 1989	8	31	451	391
Total for 1988–89	64	122	3,826	2,099
December 1989	12	30	412	536
January 1990	9	187	766	566
Total for 1989–90	68	304	4,475	2,780
December 1990	11	20	406	389
January 1991	8	4	371	299
Total for 1990–91	66	85	3,717	2,473
December 1991	12	24	630	437
January 1992	9	23	582	966
Total for 1991–92	86	115	4,722	3,466
December 1992	19	15	540	554
January 1993	27	9	455	263
Total for 1992–93	107	101	4,447	2,982
December 1993	17	9	455	480
January 1994	11	23	551	433
Total for 1993–94	107	205	4,819	2,953
December 1994	10	25	582	470
January 1995	9	2	573	822
Total for 1994–95	70	91	4,925	3,069

Winter Mortality Rates

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what have been the excess winter mortality rates in Wales for each of the past 10 years in terms of *(a)* excess numbers and *(b)* percentages for (i) people over the age of 65 years, (ii) single parent families, (iii) people in receipt of income support, (iv) people with disabilities and (v) others. [17473]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on parental status, income or physical impairment is not collected at death registration and it is therefore not possible to provide data in terms of these characteristics. The available information, provided by the Office for National Statistics, is in the following table:

	Number[1]	*Percentage*[2]
1986–87	1,642	19.8
1987–88	1,430	16.7
1988–89	761	8.6
1989–90	2,771	32.0
1990–91	2,159	24.9
1991–92	1,753	20.3
1992–93	1,410	15.8
1993–94	963	10.2
1994–95	1,445	16.1
1995–96	2,256	24.8

[1] The number by which deaths occurring in December to March exceed the average of those occurring in the previous and following four month periods.

[2] The number defined above as a percentage of the average of the autumn and summer deaths.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what have been the excess mortality rates in Wales for the past 10 years expressed *(a)* in excess numbers and *(b)* as percentages. [17443]

Mr. Jones: There is no generally accepted definition of excess mortality. The annual and quarterly numbers of deaths and rates per 1,000 population for Wales, Great Britain and the United Kingdom are shown in the Office for National Statistics quarterly publication, "Population Trends", copies of which are held in the Library.

Welsh Language Electoral Forms

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions his Office has had with *(a)* the Home Office and *(b)* the Welsh Language Board on the provision of bilingual forms for use by candidates and agents in elections; if the forms supplied to candidates and agents in Wales in the forthcoming general election will be bilingual; and if he will make a statement. [17892]

Mr. Hague: Electoral matters are the responsibility of the Home Office. The only prescribed form for use by candidates or their agents which acting returning officers are required to supply is the nomination paper which is available in a Welsh language version.

Candidates must also complete a consent to nomination, which is not supplied by the acting returning officer in a pre-printed form, and both the candidate and election agent must complete a declaration on election expenses, the form of which is prescribed but which is not currently available in a Welsh language version.

The Home Office proposes to review arrangements for the provision of all electoral forms following the general election. It will consider the use of the Welsh language in that review, consulting the Welsh Language Board as necessary.

BSE

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of concealment over BSE infection are *(a)* currently under investigation and *(b)* have been reported in each of the last two years in Wales; how many and what percentage of those investigated have resulted in (i) prosecution and (ii) conviction; and if he will make a statement. [18105]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No cases of concealment of BSE infection are currently under investigation or have been reported in the past two years.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new cases of BSE infection have been reported in Wales in each of the last 48 months; and if he will make a statement. [18106]

Mr. Evans: The distribution of confirmed cases in Wales by month of clinical onset is as follows:

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
January	324	304	130	78
February	332	229	120	71
March	302	215	125	69
April	279	166	86	45
May	263	165	100	34
June	266	168	95	35
July	283	169	90	35
August	313	126	111	44
September	295	146	93	33
October	304	163	111	40
November	261	153	86	18
December	288	172	108	13

Local Authority Employees

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in rank order the number of employees for each local authority per 1,000 of population for the most recent three years for which figures are available. [18096]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is given in the following tables:

Number of local authority employees per 1000 of population, June 1993 [1]

Counties [3]	*Total employees per 1,000 of population*	*Full-time employees per 1,000 of population*[2]	*Part-time employees per 1,000 of population*[2]
Clwyd	34.8	17.4	17.5
South Glamorgan	35.2	18.2	16.9
West Glamorgan	37.9	22.0	15.9
Gwynedd	38.2	20.0	18.2
Mid Glamorgan	39.2	22.1	17.1
Gwent	40.1	19.2	20.9
Dyfed	41.0	21.7	19.3
Districts[4]			
Brecknock	6.3	5.5	0.7
Dinefwr	6.6	6.3	0.4
Monmouth	7.5	5.9	1.6
Taff Ely	7.5	6.3	1.2
South Pembrokeshire	7.6	6.9	0.6
Ynys Mon	7.8	6.5	1.3
Alyn and Deeside	8.0	6.8	1.2
Carmarthen	8.0	6.8	1.2
Vale of Glamorgan	8.3	6.4	1.8

Number of local authority employees per 1000 of population, June 1993 [3]

Counties [1]	*Total employees per 1,000 of population*	*Full-time employees per 1,000 of population*[2]	*Part-time employees per 1,000 of population*[2]
Preseli Pembrokeshire	8.3	7.4	0.8
Ceredigion	8.3	7.8	0.5
Glyndwr	8.5	6.3	2.2
Colwyn	8.6	6.7	1.9
Radnorshire	8.9	6.2	2.6
Lliw Valley	9.1	7.6	1.5
Rhuddlan	9.1	7.8	1.3
Montgomeryshire	9.2	5.8	3.4
Ogwr	9.2	7.1	2.1
Dwyfor	9.5	8.7	0.8
Neath	9.6	8.5	1.1
Cynon Valley	9.7	9.0	0.7
Arfon	9.9	8.7	1.2
Delyn	9.9	7.2	2.7
Torfaen	10.3	8.6	1.8
Newport	10.6	8.6	2.0
Islwyn	10.7	9.5	1.2
Wrexham Maelor	11.1	9.1	2.0
Meirionnydd	11.4	9.5	1.8
Rhymney Valley	11.7	8.9	2.8
Cardiff	11.8	8.3	3.5
Rhondda	12.6	9.9	2.8
Merthyr Tydfil	12.7	11.3	1.5
Swansea	13.5	12.5	1.0
Blaenau Gwent	14.2	12.4	1.9

[1] Authorities are ranked according to total employees (i.e. the sum of full-time and part-time) per 1000 population.
[2] Full-time employees are those that work over 30 hours per week, part–time employees are those that work up to and including 30 hours per week.
[3] Data for Powys are unavailable.
[4] Data for Aberconwy, Llanelli and Port Talbot are unavailable.

Number of local authority employees per 1000 of population, June 1994[1]

	Total employees per 1,000 of population	*Full-time employees per 1,000 of population*[2]	*Part-time employees per 1,000 of population*[2]
Counties[3]			
Clwyd	33.6	16.4	17.3
South Glamorgan	35.0	18.1	17.0
West Glamorgan	38.0	22.1	15.9
Gwynedd	38.9	20.1	18.8
Mid Glamorgan	39.6	21.9	17.7
Gwent	39.8	18.8	21.0
Dyfed	41.8	21.9	19.9
Districts[4]			
Brecknock	6.1	5.4	0.6
Dinefwr	6.3	6.0	0.4
Monmouth	7.1	5.7	1.4
Vale of Glamorgan	7.6	6.3	1.2
South Pembrokeshire	7.8	7.3	0.5
Taff Ely	7.8	6.6	1.2
Ynys Môn	7.8	6.4	1.4
Alyn and Deeside	8.0	6.7	1.2
Carmarthen	8.0	6.7	1.3
Ceredigion	8.0	7.6	0.5
Colwyn	8.1	6.6	1.5
Glyndwr	8.2	5.9	2.2
Preseli Pembrokeshire	8.2	7.3	0.9
Montgomeryshire	8.4	5.6	2.8
Radnorshire	8.6	6.1	2.5

Number of local authority employees per 1000 of population, June 1994[1]

	Total employees per 1,000 of population	*Full-time employees per 1,000 of population*[2]	*Part-time employees per 1,000 of population*[2]
Lliw Valley	8.8	7.7	1.1
Rhuddlan	9.0	7.8	1.2
Ogwr	9.3	7.2	2.1
Delyn	9.4	6.8	2.7
Dwyfor	9.5	8.6	0.8
Neath	9.6	8.3	1.3
Arfon	9.8	8.4	1.3
Llanelli	10.0	9.0	1.0
Torfaen	10.0	8.2	1.7
Newport	10.4	8.7	1.7
Port Talbot	10.4	8.8	1.6
Meirionnydd	10.8	9.2	1.5
Islwyn	11.0	9.2	1.8
Wrexham Maelor	11.0	9.2	1.9
Rhymney Valley	11.4	8.7	2.7
Cardiff	12.1	8.2	3.9
Rhondda	12.6	9.8	2.8
Merthyr Tydfil	13.0	11.5	1.4
Swansea	13.4	12.2	1.2
Blaenau Gwent	14.5	12.3	2.1

[1] Authorities are ranked according to total employees (i.e. the sum of full-time and part-time) per 1000 population.
[2] Full-time employees are those that work over 30 hours per week, part-time employees are those that work up to and including 30 hours per week.
[3] Data for Powys are unavailable.
[4] Data for Aberconwy and Cynon Valley are unavailable.

Number of local authority employees per 1,000 of population, June 1995[1]

	Total employees per 1,000 of population	*Full-time employees per 1,000 of population*[2]	*Part-time employees per 1,000 of population*[2]
Counties[3]			
Clwyd	33.5	16.3	17.1
South Glamorgan	36.0	18.0	17.9
Gwent	39.6	18.3	21.3
Gwynedd	40.2	20.1	20.1
Mid Glamorgan	41.6	22.6	19.1
Dyfed	42.5	22.1	20.3
Districts[4]			
Brecknock	6.3	5.5	0.8
Dinefwr	6.6	6.1	0.5
Monmouth	6.9	5.4	1.5
Vale of Glamorgan	7.2	5.7	1.5
Ynys Môn	7.4	5.9	1.5
Carmarthen	7.9	6.6	1.3
Alyn and Deeside	7.9	6.7	1.2
South Pembrokeshire	8.1	7.8	0.3
Glyndŵr	8.2	6.0	2.3
Taff Ely	8.3	6.7	1.6
Preseli Pembrokeshire	8.4	7.5	0.9
Colwyn	8.5	6.8	1.8
Radnorshire	8.6	6.0	2.6
Montgomeryshire	8.8	5.7	3.1
Lliw Valley	8.9	7.8	1.1
Dwyfor	9.2	8.4	0.8
Rhuddlan	9.3	7.6	1.7
Aberconwy	9.5	8.5	1.0
Llanelli	9.5	8.6	0.9
Ogwr	9.7	7.4	2.3
Arfon	9.9	8.4	1.6
Delyn	10.2	7.0	3.2
Neath	10.6	9.1	1.5
Rhymney Valley	10.7	8.6	2.1
Meirionnydd	10.7	9.2	1.6
Wrexham Maelor	10.9	8.9	2.0
Port Talbot	11.0	9.4	1.6
Islwyn	12.0	9.7	2.3
Newport	12.0	8.9	3.1
Cynon Valley	12.0	8.8	3.2
Cardiff	12.8	8.4	4.3
Swansea	13.1	11.9	1.2
Merthyr Tydfil	13.3	11.8	1.5
Rhondda	13.5	10.0	3.5
Blaenau Gwent	14.6	12.2	2.4

[1] Authorities are ranked according to total employees (i.e., the sum of full-time and part-time) per 1,000 population.

[2] Full-time employees are those that work over 30 hours per week, part-time employees are those that work up to and including 30 hours per week.

[3] Data for Powys and West Glamorgan are unavailable.

[4] Data for Ceredigion and Torfaen are unavailable.

Greenmeadow Inn (Demolition)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set up a public inquiry into the manner in which decisions were taken within the Cadw organisation to facilitate the demolition of the Greenmeadow inn. [18570]

Mr. Hague: The case for listing the Greenmeadow inn, Rudry was carefully considered in the light of available evidence and with reference to policy guidance on listing. Criteria for the selection of listed buildings have been set out in Welsh Office circular 61/96, and before that in circular 61/81. My decision not to list the Greenmeadow inn was taken because it did not meet these criteria.

Gastroschisis

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the incidence of gastroschisis per 1,000 births for each health authority for the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement; [17279]

(2) how many cases of gastroschisis per 1,000 births there were in each year since 1970. [17280]

Mr. Gwilym Jones *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The available information is given in the following table. Data refer to anomalies of abdominal wall which include exomphalos, gastroschisis and prune belly (syndrome). Data for gastroschisis alone are available only at disproportionate cost. Data are shown from 1979, as before this date they were not available on a comparable basis. Rates are calculated per 10,000 live or still births. It should be noted that notification of congenital abnormalities is on a voluntary basis and, therefore, data may underestimate the true position. Terminations are not included.

Abdominal wall defects[1]

	Number notified	*Rate*
1979	9	2.5
1980	7	1.9
1981	7	1.9
1982	11	3.1
1983	9	2.5
1984	5	1.4
1985	4	1.1
1986	10	2.7
1987	6	1.6
1988	7	1.8
1989	8	2.1
1990	7	1.8
1991	9	2.4
1992	6	1.6
1993:		
Clwyd	1	2.0
East Dyfed	1	4.0
Gwent	1	1.6
Gwynedd	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	5	6.9
Pembrokeshire	—	—
Powys	1	7.1
South Glamorgan	1	1.8
West Glamorgan	—	—
Wales	10	2.7

[1] International Classification of Diseases 9th revision code 756.7.

Research and Development

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the Welsh Office Agriculture Department's research and development expenditure in each year from 1980 to the present in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices; [18028]

(2) how many veterinary scientists were employed on Government funded projects at the Central Veterinary Laboratory by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date for which figures are available, and *(b)* 31 March, (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980; [18160]

(3) how many food and agriculture scientists were employed on Government funded projects at the Central Science Laboratory by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date for which figures are available, and *(b)* 31 March, (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980; [18159]

(4) how many scientists were employed on Government-funded projects at the Institute of Food Research by his Department *(a)* the most recent date for which figures are available, and *(b)* 31 March, (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18161]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the scientific establishments receiving funding from his Department other than the Central Science Laboratory, the Central Veterinary Laboratory and the Institute of Food Research; and the number of scientists employed at these establishments on projects funded by his Department on *(a)* the most rent date for which figures are available, and *(b)* 31 March, (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18162]

Mr. Evans: The number of scientists in each establishment working on research commissioned and funded specifically by the Welsh Office, at the end of March for the particular years, is as follows:

	1985	*1990*	*1995*	*1997*
Institute of Terrestrial Ecology	6	6	8	8
Institute of Hydrology	5	4	5	7
Institute of Arable Crop Research	0	0	3	3
National Radiological Protection Board	0	10	10	10

No comparable figures are available for 1980.

In addition, the Welsh Office contributes towards the cost of work relevant to Wales in these and other establishments where the lead is taken by other Government Departments.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many food and agriculture scientists were employed by his Department *(a)* in Government-funded food and science establishments, *(b)* on Government funded projects at ADAS establishments and *(c)* on Government-funded projects at Agriculture and Food Research Council and Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council establishments at the most recent date available; and how many were employed at 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18029]

Mr. Evans: None. Work by food and agriculture scientists on behalf of the Welsh Office is carried out under contract or memoranda of understanding.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many scientists were employed by his Department and each of his Department's agencies at the most recent date available; how many were in each year since 1979 on research on matters within the responsibility of the Agriculture Department; and if he will list each agency, service and central laboratory employing such scientists. [18032]

Mr. Evans: The Welsh Office employs a number of scientific experts. There are no staff working in scientific grades with Cadw, Welsh Historic Monuments, the only agency for which the Department has sole responsibility. The Department has not employed scientists to work on agricultural research matters since 1979.

Veterinary Surgeons

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many veterinary surgeons were employed by his Department and on projects funded by his Department at the most recent date available; and how many at 31 March in each year since 1979. [18030]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None. Veterinary surgeons working on behalf of the Welsh Office are employed by MAFF.

Meat Hygiene Inspectors

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many meat hygiene inspectors were employed by his Department, at the most recent date available; and how many were employed in each year since 1979. [18031]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No meat inspectors have been employed by the Welsh Office.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Research and Development

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his Department's research and development expenditure was for each year from 1980 to the present in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices. [18026]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 27 February 1997, *Official Report*, column *325*.

BSE

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the full economic cost to the United Kingdom of the BSE crisis, excluding the cost to the Government. [18033]

Mr. Baldry: The Ministry is commissioning an independent study to provide a comprehensive assessment of the economic impact of BSE across the whole UK economy and within particular regions. The study is expected to be completed during September 1997.

British Agrochemicals Association

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *636*, regarding the British Agrochemicals Association, if the representations from the association included any relating to the taxation of *(a)* pesticides and *(b)* fertilisers; and if he will make a statement. [18449]

Mrs. Browning: The British Agrochemicals Association's representations to my Department have included the fees and levy which fund the control and monitoring of pesticides but they have not related to the taxation of pesticides. No representations have been received from the association on the taxation of fertilisers.

Drug-resistant Parasites

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has evaluated on the incidence of drug-resistant nematode worms in sheep. [17817]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 27 February 1997, *Official Report*, column *328*. In addition, no veterinary medicine is authorised for use unless it meets stringent statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. Information submitted in support of applications for authorisation of products intended for the prevention or treatment of infectious diseases or parasitic infestations must include data on the emergence of resistant organisms. Information relating to the authorisation of specific products, however, is subject to the confidentiality requirements of section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968.

Scientists

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those scientific establishments other than the Central Science Laboratory, Central Veterinary Laboratory or Institute of Food Research receiving funding from the Department, indicating the number of scientists employed at each on projects funded by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18192]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The following is a list of establishments at which MAFF currently funds research. Information on previous years and on the number of scientists employed by each contractor is not available.

Aberdeen University
Aberystwyth University
ADAS
Advanced Technologies (Cambridge) Ltd.
AEA Technology
Alistair Hardy Foundation for Ocean Science
Animal Health Trust
Aspland and James Ltd.
Aston University
Babraham Institute
Babtie Group
Beatson Institute for Cancer Research
BIBRA Toxicology International
Birmingham University
Bradford University
Brighton University
Bristol University
British Geological Survey
British Market Research Bureau Ltd.
British Trust for Ornithology
Caledonian University
Cambac JMA Research Limited
Cambridge Environment Research Cons. Ltd.
Cambridge Laboratory
Cambridge University
Campden and Chorleywood Food Research Association
Canterbury Christchurch College
Cardiff University
CEFAS Laboratories
Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research
Chalcolmbe Agricultural Resources
Chembiotech Laboratories
Consortium of Local Authorities
Contractors in Collaborative Trial
Coventry University
Dairy Research and Consultancy Ltd.
De Montfort University
Delft Hydraulics
Dundee University
Dunn Clinical Nutrition Centre
Durham University
Ecoscope Applied Ecologists
Elm Farm Research Centre
Exeter University
Forest Research Station (Alice Holt)
Forestry Authority
Game Conservancy Trust
GENUS
Glasgow Science Services
Glasgow University
Hannah Research Institute
Harper Adams Agricultural College
Heather Trust, The
Henry Doubleday Research Association
Herschel Smith Laboratory for Medicinal Chemistry
Home Grown Cereals Authority
Horseracing Forensic Laboratory
Horticulture Research International
Hull University
Humberside University
Hydraulics Research Wallingford Group Ltd.
Institute for Animal Health
Institute of Arable Crops Research
Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research
Institute of Occupational Medicine Limited
Institute of Plant Science Research
Institute of Terrestrial Ecology
Institute of Virology and Environmental Microbiology
Institute of Zoology
Intera Information Technologies Limited
John Innes Centre
Laboratory of the Government Chemist
Lancaster University
Land Research Associates
Laser Technologies Ltd.
Leatherhead Food Research Association
Leeds University
Leicester University
Liverpool John Moores University

Liverpool University
London Hospital Medical College
London, City University
Loughborough University of Technology
Marine Resource Consultants Ltd.
Meat and Livestock Commission
Medical Research Council
Moredun Research Institute
Mylnefield Research Services Ltd.
National Consumer Council
National Inst. of Agricultural Botany
National Poisons Unit
National Radiological Protection Board
National Trust
Natural Resources Institute
Newcastle University
North East Wales Institute
Nottingham Trent University
Nuclear Electric, Berkeley Technology Centre
Oxford Lipid Metabolism Group
Oxford University
Paterson Institute
Phoenix Research Laboratory
PIRA International
Plymouth University
Portsmouth University
Processors and Growers Research Association
Public and Corporate Economic Consultants
Public Health Laboratory Services
Queen's University of Belfast
RAPRA Technology Limited
RCD—Radio Carbon Dating
Reading Scientific Services Limited
Reading University
Remote Sensing Applications Consultants
Rendel Geotechnics Consultants
Research Services Ltd.
RHM Technology
Roslin Institute, Edinburgh
Rowett Research Institute
Royal Agricultural College
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine
Royal Postgraduate Medical School
Royal Veterinary College
RPS Clouston
RSC Analytical Methods Committee
School of Ocean Sciences
Scottish Agricultural College, Bucksburn
Scottish Consumer Council
Scottish Crop Research Institute
Scottish Parasite Diagnostic Laboratory
Scottish Universities Research and Reactor Centre
Sea Mammal Research Unit
Sheffield University
Siemens Environmental Systems Ltd.
Silsoe Research Institute
SOAEFD Marine Laboratory
Social and Community Planning Research
South Bank University
Southampton University
St. Andrews University
St. Bartholomew's Hospital
St. Mary's Hospital Medical School
St. Thomas' Hospital, Rayne Institute
Stirling University
Strathclyde University
Surrey Medical Imaging Systems Ltd.
Surrey University
Sussex University
Swansea University
UCNW (Bangor University)
UL Birkbeck College
UL Imperial College
UL Kings College
UL Queen Mary and Westfield College
UL University College
UL Wye College
United Medical and Dental School
University of East Anglia
University of East London
University of Edinburgh
University of Essex
University of Hertfordshire
University of Luton
University of Manchester
University of Ulster
University of York
Vegetarian Society
W. S. Atkins Science and Technology
Wales University, Swansea
Water Research Centre
Westlakes Research (Trading) Ltd.
Westminster University
Wisdom Agricultural Limited
Writtle College

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many scientists were employed by his Department and each of his Department's agencies at the most recent date available; how many were employed in each year since 1979; and if he will list each agency, service and central laboratory employing scientists on projects funded by his Department. [18025]

Mr. Hogg: The numbers of staff in scientific grades, excluding veterinary grades, employed by my Department and its agencies at the most recent date available in 1997, and at 1 April in each year since 1979 are shown in the following table. The Meat Hygiene Service does not employ any staff in scientific grades.

A list of establishments at which MAFF is currently funding research has already been supplied in a reply given to the hon. Gentleman today.

Scientific staff employed in the Department and agencies

Date	*MAFF*	*VMD*	*VLA*	*CSL*	*PSD*	*ADAS*	*Total*
1 April 1979	1,826	—	—	—	—	—	1,826
1 April 1980	2,051	—	—	—	—	—	2,051
1 April 1981	1,983	—	—	—	—	—	1,983
1 April 1982	1,916	—	—	—	—	—	1,916
1 April 1983	1,836	—	—	—	—	—	1,836
1 April 1984	1,713	—	—	—	—	—	1,713
1 April 1985	1,736	—	—	—	—	—	1,736
1 April 1986	1,755	—	—	—	—	—	1,755
1 April 1987	1,650	—	—	—	—	—	1,650
1 April 1988	1,661	—	—	—	—	—	1,661
1 April 1989	1,645	11	—	—	—	—	1,656
1 April 1990	1,437	12	260	—	—	—	1,709
1 April 1991	1,450	14	288	—	—	—	1,752
1 April 1992	726	19	294	302	—	425	1,766
1 April 1993	802	18	286	301	—	410	1,817
1 April 1994	555	19	307	[1]463	119	401	1,864
1 April 1995	605	19	317	493	121	360	1,915
1 April 1996	422	23	[2]515	488	128	336	1,912
1 January 1997	430	21	513	[3]399	127	281	1,771

Figures for the agencies are given from the date of their establishment.
[1] The Central Science Laboratory Agency includes the MAFF food science laboratories from 1 April 1994.
[2] The Veterinary Laboratories Agency includes the MAFF veterinary investigation service from 1 April 1996.
[3] The Central Science Laboratory Agency co-located to a single site at Sand Hutton during 1996.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many food and agriculture scientists were employed by his Department *(a)* in Government-funded food and science establishments, *(b)* on Government-funded projects at ADAS establishments and *(c)* on Government-funded projects at the Agricultural and Food Research Council, and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council on *(a)* the most recent date available; and *(b)* 31 March, (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18027]

Mr. Hogg: The information requested is either unavailable or could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and food how many food and agriculture scientists were employed on Government-funded projects at the Central Science Laboratory by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18189]

Mr. Hogg: The latest forecast indicates that for the year to 31 March 1997 there will be 435 food and agriculture scientists employed at the Central Science Laboratory on projects funded by my Department. Comparable figures for 1995 were 492 and for 1993, 281. Information prior to establishment as an Agency on 1 April 1992 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Staff numbers rose in April 1994 as a result of the merger with MAFF food science laboratories and relaunch as an enlarged agency.

Meat Hygiene Inspectors

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many meat hygiene inspectors were employed by his Department and by the Meat Hygiene Service at the most recent date available; and in each year since 1979. [18024]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No meat hygiene inspectors are, or have been, employed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The Meat Hygiene Service was established as an executive agency of MAFF on 1 April 1995 and took over responsibility from local authorities for meat hygiene and inspection in licensed fresh meat premises.

Staffing matters are the responsibility of the Meat Hygiene Service and I have asked the chief executive, Mr. Johnston McNeill, to reply to the hon. Member direct.

Letter from J. McNeill to Dr. Gavin Strang, dated 5 March 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) your Parliamentary Questions to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Scotland concerning the number of Meat Hygiene Inspectors (MHIs) employed by the Meat Hygiene Service at the most recent date available and in each year since 1979 has been passed to me for reply.(18024)

The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) was established as an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) on 1 April 1995. It took over from some 300 local authorities responsibility for enforcing meat hygiene, inspection and animal welfare at slaughter legislation in licensed fresh meat premises in England, Scotland and Wales. Consequently, I am unable to supply details of staffing numbers prior to the Agency vesting date of 1 April 1995.

On a full time equivalent basis, the MHS currently employs 761 MHIs in England and 158 MHIs in Scotland.

The MHS employed a total of 803 MHIs as at 1 April 1995 and 850 MHIs as at 1 April 1996. The MHS is unable to provide a territorial breakdown of these previous years figures.

Vitamin B6 Supplements

Mr. Hain: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement about the safety of vitamin B6 supplements; [18267]

(2) if he will ask the Food Advisory Committee to review the safety of vitamin B6 supplements. [18386]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 20 January 1997, *Official Report*, column *480*. Since then, the secretariat of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment—COT—has received further data relating to the safety of vitamin B6. This will be

considered by the COT at its next meeting. The Food Advisory Committee will consider what, if any, action needs to be taken to ensure that consumers are not put at risk in the light of any further advice from the COT.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he requested the Food Advisory Committee to make an independent assessment of recommendations supplied to it by the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment in regard to the safety of vitamin B6 supplements before issuing its press release on 19 December in relation to nerve damage from the consumption of vitamin B6 supplements. [18382]

Mrs. Browning: The Food Advisory Committee relies upon the toxicological assessments made by the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment and other relevant expert committees in reaching its own independent judgment of any action which may be necessary to ensure the chemical safety of food. In the case of vitamin B6, the FAC was not asked to carry out its own toxicological assessment as this does not form part of its terms of reference.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports of peripheral neuropathy in association with the consumption of vitamin B6 supplements at doses of up to 200mg per day were evaluated in the recently completed study carried out by the medical toxicology unit to monitor the safety of dietary supplements and natural remedies. [18385]

Mrs. Browning: The medical toxicology unit study commissioned by this Department on toxicological problems resulting from exposure to traditional medicines and food supplements did not include any reported cases of peripheral neuropathy associated with the consumption of vitamin B6.

Food Safety Investigations

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many food safety incidents his Department investigated in 1996. [18388]

Mrs. Browning: The investigation of food safety incidents is generally the responsibility of local authorities. In exceptional cases where a potential public health risk has regional or national implications or where there is a major local incident, local authorities notify the Department of Health, which will take action as appropriate through the food hazard warning system. There were 144 food safety incidents reported to the Department of Health during 1996.

Sustainability Indicators (Agrochemicals)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the validity of the level of pesticide and fertiliser use as an indicator of sustainability. [18451]

Mrs. Browning: The level of pesticide use in terms of tonnage applied or number of spray applications is not a good indicator of sustainability. Several hundred different chemicals are approved as pesticides. Each has a different environmental impact and the relative impact of different chemicals may not be closely related to the amount used.

Similarly the amount of fertiliser used is not a good indicator of environmental impact. The timing and method of application also affect the efficiency with which nutrients are taken up and hence the amounts released into the environment.

Plans to develop and improve the indicators already published in "Indicators of Sustainable Development for the United Kingdom", which include indicators on nutrients and pesticides, were published in "Rural England 1966".

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the potential of economic instruments for achieving sustainability with regard to pesticide and fertiliser use. [18450]

Mrs. Browning: The Government intend shortly to issue a discussion paper on the options for using economic instruments, including instruments for pesticides and fertilisers, to achieve water protection policy objectives.

Diseased Animals (Compensation)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much compensation has been paid to animals slaughtered to prevent the spread of animal diseases in 1996. [18389]

Mrs. Browning: The information requested is as follows:

	£000
BSE	6,956
Newcastle disease	7
Salmonella	121
Brucellosis	13
TB	2,276
Total	9,373

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, columns *77–78*, on compensation for diseased animals, what infections the compensation was paid out for; and how much was paid for each infection in each year from 1985 to 1991. [18425]

Mrs. Browning: The information requested for the years 1985–86 to 1991–92 is as follows:

£000

	1985–86	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*
Swine fever	—	458	277	—	—	—	—
Fowl plague	—	—	—	—	—	—	6
Foot and mouth	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Brucellosis	1,588	464	74	60	307	22	11
TB	231	218	298	336	462	864	496
TB in deer	—	—	—	—	169	116	8

£000

	1985–86	1986–87	1987–88	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92
Salmonella	—	—	—	4	1,237	1,779	1,703
BSE	—	—	—	1,067	4,028	10,663	20,126
Total	1,819	1,140	649	1,467	6,203	13,444	22,354

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total amount paid as compensation for *(a)* poultry, *(b)* cattle and *(c)* other animals as a result of the slaughter of diseased or suspected diseased animals in each year from 1985 to 1991; and if he will make a statement. [15713]

Mrs. Browning *[pursuant to her answer, 24 February 1997, c. 77–78]:* The information requested on slaughter compensation is as follows:

	1985–86	1986–87	1987–88	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92
a) Poultry	—	—	—	4	1,237	1,779	1,709
b) Cattle	1,819	682	372	1,463	4,797	11,549	20,637
c) Others	—	458	277	—	169	116	8
Total	1,819	1,140	649	1,467	6,203	13,444	22,354

Intervention Storage

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the ecu prices per kilo achieved by meat plants for beef accepted for intervention storage in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland since 1996; and if he will make a statement on the reason for differential prices regionally for beef going into intervention storage. [18337]

Mr. Baldry: Differential regional prices for intervention purposes only occur in the areas of Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Northern Ireland is considered a separate region for intervention purchases in recognition of the particular importance of the beef sector there, and the effect of its proximity to the Republic of Ireland market.

Prices awarded since March 1996 are as follows:

Date of tender	Steers	Young bulls	Steers	Young bulls
9 April 1996	261	240	241	220
7 May 1996	245	232	245	232
28 May 1996	234	219	243	225
11 June 1996	231	211	240.98	219.99
25 May 1996	247.431	216.237	244.575	223.608
9 July 1997	246.61	217.464	244.23	221.759
23 July 1997	249.872	224.085	242.892	[1]—
6 August 1996	240.784	227.31	230.054	209.6
27 August 1996	232.247	218.727	222.936	[1]—
10 September 1996	228.698	218.481	222.438	[1]—
24 September 1996	236.234	214.879	225.542	193.964
8 October 1996	237.313	215.03	226.211	197.376
22 October 1996	238.692	212.412	226.067	[1]—
12 November 1996	254.809	224.839	232.074	[1]—
26 November 1996	266	266	266	[1]—
10 December 1996	266	253.5	266	[1]—
14 January 1997	273	273	273	[1]—
28 January 1997	273	273	273	[1]—
11 February 1997	273	259.961	273	[1]—
25 February 1997	273	258.081	273	[1]—

[1] No bids submitted.

Rendering Industry

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each rendering firm, the amounts paid to them by the Intervention Board for rendering cattle covered by the over-30-months scheme, as *(a)* pounds and *(b)* percentage of the total; and if he will list the (i) tonnage and (ii) number of such cattle rendered by each rendering firm. [18495]

Mr. Baldry: The provision of details of payments made to individual renderers, or other information from which such payments could be deduced, would breach commercial confidentiality. Information on a UK basis is as follows:

	UK total
Tonnage of material rendered on which payment made to 28 February 1997	449,590
Total payments, including VAT made to renderers to 28 February 1997 (£ million)	55.4
Estimated animals covered by above payments[1]	977,370

[1] Based on 460 kg of processed material per animal.

Veterinary Scientists

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many veterinary scientists were employed on Government-funded projects at the Central Veterinary Laboratory by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18190]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have asked the chief executive of the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Dr T. W. A. Little, to reply on my behalf.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Dr. Gavin Strang, dated 5 March 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on the numbers of veterinary scientists employed on Government funded projects at CVL for various dates. [18190]

I should, perhaps, explain that we do not have a grade or job description that covers specifically "veterinary scientists". The table below relates to veterinary grades with an indication of the numbers of qualified vets in those posts.

	Figures at March 1997	*Figures at March 1995*
Permanent veterinary	23	20
Permanent non-veterinary	19	18
Total	42	38

The figures are only available for these dates since the others you indicated relate to our pre-Agency days and they will, therefore, have been included in the replies by the Minister to the other questions you tabled.

As I am sure you know, as a result of the merger with the Veterinary Investigation Service in October 1995, CVL has been part of the larger Veterinary Laboratories Agency. In addition to the figures shown above there are a further 63 staff at March 1997 within the Veterinary Investigation Division (old Veterinary Investigation Service) of the VLA. Again, for the pre-merger dates figures for the Veterinary Investigation Service will have been included in the Minister's reply.

The figures I have quoted are for all our veterinary grade staff in CVL and we cannot distinguish those employed solely on government-funded projects. However, over 80 per cent. of our business is for MAFF and therefore the majority of staff in the veterinary grade will be employed on Government-funded projects.

Research Establishments

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will make available further memorandums concerning the prior options reviews of his Department's public sector research establishment.[19202]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Memorandums on the Central Science Laboratory, Horticulture Research International and the Veterinary Laboratories Agency have now been placed in the Library of the House. These set out the rationale underlying the decisions taken concerning these establishments, which I announced on 9 December for the CSL and on 29 January for HRI and the VLA.

Veterinary Surgeons

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many veterinary surgeons were employed by his Department and on projects funded by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available, and *(b)* 31 March of each year since 1979. [18023]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The numbers of veterinary surgeons employed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at 1 April each year since 1979 are as follows:

Year	*Number of veterinary surgeons*					
	VFS and VIS	*CVL*	*CSG*	*VMD*	*MHS*	*Total*
1979	491	102.5	—	—	—	593
1980	483	99	—	—	—	582
1981	471	97	—	—	—	568
1982	459	95.5	—	—	—	554.5
1983	467	72.5	—	—	—	539.5
1984	460	85.5	—	—	—	545.5
1985	444	83.5	—	—	—	527.5
1986	422	75.5	—	—	—	497.5
1987	381	67.5	—	—	—	448.5
1988	381.5	71.5	1	—	—	454
1989	376.5	63.5	1	11	—	452
1990	391	[1]n/a	1	11	—	403
1991	408	[1]n/a	1	12	—	421
1992	425.6	[1]n/a	1	12	—	438.6
1993	422.3	[1]n/a	1	10	—	433.3
1994	408.8	[1]n/a	1	12	—	421.8
1995	395.5	[2]20	2	12	42	471.5

[1] Figures are not available for CVL for these years.
[2] Does not include veterinary surgeons in the senior civil service in CVL.
Abbreviations:
VFS: Veterinary Field Service.
CVL: Central Veterinary Laboratory.
VIS: Veterinary Investigation Service.
CSG: Chief Scientist's Group.
VMD: Veterinary Medicines Directorate.
MHS: Meat Hygiene Service.

On 1 October 1995, The Veterinary Investigation Service joined the Central Veterinary Laboratory to form the Veterinary Laboratories Agency.

Year	*VFS*	*CVL and VIS*	*CSG*	*VMD*	*MHS*	*Total*
1996	294.6	[1]60	2	15	42	413.6
Current	297.5	[2]87	4	14	45	445.5

[1] Figures are not available for CVL for these years.
[2] Does not include veterinary surgeons in the senior civil service in CVL.
Abbreviations:
VFS: Veterinary Field Service.
CVL: Central Veterinary Laboratory.
VIS: Veterinary Investigation Service.
CSG: Chief Scientist's Group.
VMD: Veterinary Medicines Directorate.
MHS: Meat Hygiene Service.

The figures for the number of veterinary surgeons engaged in projects funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are not held centrally. They could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 6 March 1997

SCOTLAND

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16799]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A list of the number of written and oral parliamentary questions answered by the Department in the Sessions 1982–83 to 1995–96, as supplied by the POLIS unit, has been placed in the House Library. Figures for 1979–80 to 1981–82 are not available. The rest of the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Glenfeshie and Rothiemurchus Estates

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what payments have been agreed under the management agreements with the *(a)* Glenfeshie and *(b)* Rothiemurchus estates. [17508]

Mr. Kynoch: These agreements were entered into before the formation of Scottish Natural Heritage and, unlike the present arrangements, details did not appear in a readily identifiable manner in its predecessor bodies' annual reports. If the hon. Member cares to write to Scottish Natural Heritage, it should be able to supply him with the information requested.

Animal and Poultry Research Establishments

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the proposed funding reductions to animal and poultry research establishments in Scotland; and what meetings he has had with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food concerned to discuss the consequences. [17967]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The main animal and poultry research establishment in Scotland is the Roslin Institute in Midlothian, whose largest source of funding is the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. That funding is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, but I am advised that, while some reductions will take place as a result of existing projects coming to an end and of changes in MAFF's policy requirements, MAFF will continue to fund a substantial programme of research at the Roslin Institute in 1997–98 covering wide range of its programme.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no meetings with my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on this matter.

Local Authority Employees

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in rank order the number of employees for each local authority per 1,000 of population for the most recent three years for which figures are available. [18095]

Mr. Kynoch: As the information requested is lengthy, I have arranged for it to be placed in the House Library.

Homeless Households

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many households have been accepted as homeless by local authorities in rural areas in Scotland in each year since 1979; [18673]

(2) how many households have been accepted as homeless by local authorities in Scotland in each year since 1979. [18674]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information available centrally is set out in the table.

Number of households assessed as homeless or potentially homeless by local authorities following application under the current housing legislation, for whom accommodation has subsequently been secured

	All Scotland	*Rural authorities*
1978–79	9,078	1,987
1979–80	8,495	1,683
1980–81	7,929	1,488
1981–82	8,877	1,767
1982–83	9,127	1,754
1983–84	8,888	1,859
1984–85	10,469	1,910
1985–86	12,546	2,000
1986–87	12,860	2,192
1987–88	11,723	2,372
1988–89	12,201	2,555
1989–90	14,303	2,892
1990–91	16,875	3,318
1991–92	19,174	3,822
1992–93	20,943	4,573
1993–94	19,892	4,180
1994–95	18,440	4,125

1. The information above is based on case returns by local authorities which are available for around 95 per cent. of applications (though the proportion varies between local authorities). Accordingly the figures given understate the true position.

2. Districts with a population density of less than one person per hectare in 1981 are considered to be rural.

3. Statistics for 1995–96 will be published on 27 March 1997 in a statistical bulletin.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18812]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *506–7*. Any additional information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Further Education

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will publish his report on the discharge of his duties for further education in Scotland, as required under section 1 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992; and if he will make a statement. [19481]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am pleased that my report on further education in Scotland for 1996 has been published today and has been laid before each House of Parliament.

Copies are available in the Library of the House.

The report, entitled "Further Education in Scotland 1996: Report by the Secretary of State for Scotland", shows that further education colleges continue to improve their delivery of a quality service to students and employers. Incorporation has been a major success, which can be seen by the colleges' achievement of 6 per cent. efficiency gains and a 9 per cent. increase in student activity in 1995–96.

Nutritional Standards

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the extent to which Scottish schools will have complied with the recommendations contained in the diet action plan for Scotland by the end of 1997–98. [17378]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 5 March 1997]:* Implementation of these recommendations in schools is a matter for local authorities.

Education, Health and Social Security Spending

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what current spending is per annum on education, health and social security in Scotland; how many people are involved in delivering these services; what the equivalent spending figures were in real terms *(a)* five and *(b)* seven years ago; and if he will make a statement. [17544]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 March 1997]:* Figures on social security are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. The latest information available on education and health is set out in the table:

	Service spending (£ million, 1995–96 prices)			*Number of people involved in delivering services (full-time equivalents)*
	1988–89	*1990–91*	*1995–96*	*1995–96*
Education[1]	3,174	3,357	4,056	[2]98,665
Health	3,437	3,538	4,092	114,114

[1] Figures make no adjustment to back years for transfers e.g. higher education from the Department for Education to the Scottish Office in 1993.

[2] Figures cover local authority education services (77,135), further education (11,695) and higher education (9,835). The higher education figures are provisional and do not include support staff.

Scientists

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those scientific establishments other than the Central Science Laboratory, Central Veterinary Laboratory and the Institute of Food Research receiving funding from the Department indicating the number of scientists employed at each on projects funded by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18172]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 5 March 1997]:* The Scottish Office funds agriculture and related research with a wide range of contractors. The main contractors which were funded by the Scottish Office on 1 March 1997 and 31 March 1995 are listed in the table. Details of contractors funded by the Scottish Office on the earlier dates are not held centrally.

Information on the number of scientists employed by each contractor on projects funded by the Scottish Office is not held centrally.

1 March 1997

ADAS
Bell Ingram
Biomathematics and Statistics Scotland
The Central Science Laboratory
Entec Ltd.
The Hannah Research Institute
The Institute of Arable Crops Research
The Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research
The Institute of Hydrology
The Macaulay Land Use Research Institute
Mike Madders Associates
The Moredun Research Institute
The Robert Gordon University
The Roslin Research Institute
The Rowett Research Institute
The Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh
The Scottish Agricultural College
The Scottish Crop Research Institute
The University of Aberdeen
The University of Cambridge
The University of Durham
The University of Edinburgh
The University of Glasgow
The University of Lancaster
The University of Leeds
The University of Manchester.

31 March 1995

ADAS
The Agriculture Research Institute of Northern Ireland
Biomathematics and Statistics Scotland
Children in Scotland
The Hannah Research Institute
The Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research
The Institute of Terrestrial Ecology
The Macaulay Land Use Research Institute
The Moredun Research Institute
The Roslin Research Institute
The Rowett Research Institute

The Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh
The Scottish Agricultural College
The Scottish Crop Research Institute
The Silsoe Research Institute
The University of Aberdeen
The University of Birmingham
The University of Dundee
The University of Edinburgh
The University of Glasgow
The University of Lancaster
The University of Stirling.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18816]

Mr. Bates: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 17 December 1996, *Official Report* columns *506–7.*

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid (Human Growth Hormone Treatments)

Ms Eagle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what has been the cost to the legal aid budget to date of the litigation in respect of human growth hormone treatments. [18085]

Mr. Streeter: As at 28 February 1997, the Legal Aid Board has made payments on account totalling £940,355 to the solicitors conducting the case. The main action has been successful and the court made a costs order in favour of the successful plaintiffs. Depending on the final outcome of all litigation, the board will recover some or all of its costs from the defendants.

Legal Aid (Rochdale Court Closure)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate he has made of the impact on legal bills, with particular reference to the legal aid budget, of increased travelling by solicitors required by the closure of Rochdale county court. [17972]

Mr. Streeter: None. Consideration of the closure of Rochdale county court is at a very preliminary stage. A final decision, which will follow public consultation, will be taken only when the implications for court users, and the legal aid fund, have been fully assessed.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18814]

Mr. Streeter: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Economic Secretary on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *507–8.* Any additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his Department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18931]

Mr. Streeter: A breakdown by project of the Lord Chancellor's Department's PFI schemes, as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book, is given in table 1. Current estimates are shown in table 2.

Table 1. Red book figures

Estimated capital investment:	*1997–98* £ million	*1998–99* £ million	*1999–2000* £ million	*Total* £ million
Project:				
LOCCS (Court Service IT)	2	1	1	4
Sheffield Family Hearing Centre	6	2	0	8
Probate Records Store	12	2	0	14
ARAMIS (Resource Accounting IT)	2	4	3	9
MASS (Magistrates Courts IT)	8	12	12	32
Magistrates Pathfinder (Accommodation)	0	8	8	16
Magistrates Accommodation (tranche 1)	0	39	39	78
Magistrates Accommodation (tranche 2)	0	0	46	46
PRFD (Central London Accommodation)	31	10	0	41
East Anglia Court Accommodation	0	10	9	19
Total	61	88	118	267

(Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million)

Table 2. Current revised figures

Estimated capital investment:	*1997–98* £ million	*1998–99* £ million	*1999–2000* £ million	*Total* £ million
Project:				
LOCCS (Court Service IT)	4	4	4	11
Sheffield Family Hearing Centre	0	1	5	6
Probate Records Store	1	11	2	14
ARAMIS (Resource Accounting IT)	11	6	3	19
MASS (Magistrates Courts IT)	3	12	12	27
Magistrates Pathfinder (Accommodation)	0	8	8	16
Magistrates Accommodation (tranche 1)	0	26	45	71
Magistrates Accommodation (tranche 2)	0	0	25	25
PRFD (Central London Accommodation)	0	0	0	0

Table 2. Current revised figures

Estimated capital investment:	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*Total*
	£ million	*£ million*	*£ million*	*£ million*
East Anglia Court Accommodation	0	10	9	19
Total	19	78	113	208

(Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million)

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sport

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions her Department has had with (i) the Central Council for Physical Recreation, (ii) the British Universities Sports Association, (iii) the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and (iv) the National Union of Students regarding *(a)* the encouragement of sport among young people, *(b)* the availability of resources for sport and physical recreation within the further and higher education sector and *(c)* Britain's preparations for the 2000 Olympics. [17412]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 26 February 1997]:* I had discussions with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, the Standing Conference of Principals and the Further Education Funding Council prior to publishing the sports policy statement, "Sport: Raising the Game", in July 1995. These discussions formed the basis of chapter 3 of the policy statement, which included undertakings by the three organisations to provide a more detailed picture of provision for sporting opportunities and sports facilities in the further and higher education sectors. The FEFC report was published in June 1996 and the CVCP/SCOP report was published in December 1996. These reports highlighted best practice and made proposals which, if pursued, will be in the interests of the institutions and their students.

The United Kingdom Sports Council is intending to explore greater associations with universities, especially in relation to the British Academy of Sport. The UKSC has not as yet had any specific discussions with the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the CVCP or the National Union of Students on the three issues raised, but recognises that they must count as possible partners in any joint approach to the future development of student sport.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Whitemoor Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the staff present in the emergency control room at HMP Whitemoor on the evening of 9 September 1994 were interviewed by the Woodcock inquiry. [16865]

Miss Widdecombe: Sir John Woodcock's report records that more than 100 prison officers were interviewed by his inquiry. I understand that the identity of witnesses to the inquiry is covered by an undertaking of confidentiality given by the inquiry.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were present in the emergency control room at HMP Whitemoor on the evening of 9 September 1994. [16864]

Miss Widdecombe: Five.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) who issued the instructions to desensitise the prison perimeter fence at HMP Whitemoor on 9 September 1994; [16862]

(2) at what time and for how long the prison perimeter fence at HMP Whitemoor was desensitised on 9 September 1994. [16861]

Miss Widdecombe: I understand that Sir John Woodcock found no reason to believe that the sensitivity of the perimeter fence alarm at Her Majesty's prison Whitemoor was below the required standard on 9 September 1994.

Prison Security

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures should occur in the event of an alarmed dispersal prison perimeter fence being activated; what safeguards are in place to ensure the effective implementation of these procedures; and in what circumstances these procedures or safeguards would not occur. [16860]

Miss Widdecombe: The procedures to be followed in the event of a perimeter fence alarm being activated in a dispersal prison are set out in local operational orders drawn up by the governor and in local contingency plans agreed with the director of dispersal prisons. Perimeter fence alarms are required to be tested daily, and the procedures should be regularly reviewed and tested by means of exercises based on the contingency plans. These arrangements are aimed at ensuring that effective procedures are in place and it is not possible to foresee the circumstances in which they would not be followed.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what safeguards are in place to ensure that desensitised alarms on dispersal prison perimeter fences remain sensitive enough to detect wires being cut. [16859]

Miss Widdecombe: The requirements for the operation and testing of perimeter fence alarm systems are set out in the Prison Service's security systems operation and testing manual. Such alarm systems are required to be tested daily with a spring-loaded instrument which imparts a pre-determined impact onto the wire mesh fence. This impact must be registered on the alarm monitoring system. The sensitivity of the alarm must not be reduced below this level.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he issues as to the circumstances which should cause dispersal prison *(a)* perimeter fences alarms to be turned off and *(b)* perimeter fences to be desensitised. [16857]

Miss Widdecombe: There should be no occasion when the perimeter fence alarm in a dispersal prison is turned off. A perimeter fence alarm can be modulated according to environmental conditions, for example, to prevent very high winds causing repeated false alarms.

Television Licence Fine Defaulters

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people served a prison sentence during 1996 for television licence fine default; and if he will make a statement. [17964]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Scott to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 6 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of people who have served a prison sentence during 1996 for television licence fine default.

Provisional information for 1996 shows that 336 people—245 males and 91 females—were received into prison for defaulting on a fine after conviction for using a television without a licence.

Prison Establishments (Children)

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prison establishments are currently holding children under 17 years of age; how many children are in each; and what arrangements are being made for their education. [17482]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Scott to Ms Diane Abbott, dated 6 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about prison establishments currently holding children under 17 years of age; how many children are in each; and what arrangements are being made for their education.

Details of the number of 15 and 16 year olds held in prison establishments on 31 January 1997 (the latest date for which figures are available) are given in the attached table.

Education in non-contracted out prisons in England and Wales is provided by contractors which were appointed by competitive tender in 1993. Statutory responsibility for prison education and training lies with the Home Secretary.

The Young Offender Institution Consolidated Rules (June 1995) state that for prisoners aged less than 17, at least 15 hours a week of "education or training courses" will be provided.

Prison governors are being encouraged to prioritise their education provision on specific areas which are included in the recently introduced core curriculum for prison education. Education provision will focus on core subjects, basic education (literacy and numeracy), information technology, life and social skills. Additionally, education contractors are being asked to consider linking their education provision for those under 17 years of age, to the National Curriculum for schools where appropriate.

Population of 15 and 16 year olds in prison service establishments, 31 January 1997[1] by sex and establishment

Establishment	*15 year olds*	*16 year olds*	*All aged 15–16*
Askham Grange	0	1	1
Aylesbury	1	10	11
Brinsford	18	35	53
Bullwood Hall	0	4	4
Cardiff	5	4	9
Castington	0	2	2
Deerbolt	20	34	54
Doncaster	7	29	36
Exeter	1	3	4
Feltham	61	128	189
Glen Parva	29	46	75
Gloucester	0	7	7
Hindley	9	39	48
Hollesley Bay	1	12	13
Holloway	0	2	2
Hull	4	4	8
Huntercombe	0	30	30
Lancaster Farms	7	16	23
Low Newton	3	23	26
Moorland	3	8	11
New Hall	2	1	3
Northallerton	4	13	17
Onley	16	32	48
Portland	22	54	76
Stoke Heath	14	36	50
Styal	0	4	4
Swansea	0	6	6
Swinfen Hall	0	3	3
Thorn Cross	3	10	13
Werrington	14	47	61
Wetherby	15	36	51
Blank/other	2	3	5
Total males	257	666	923
Total females	2	13	15
All establishments	261	682	943

[1] All figures are provisional.

Prisoner Admittance (Costs)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the average cost of admitting a prisoner into each prison type. [17496]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 6 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average cost of admitting a prisoner into each type of prison.

This information is not available centrally as the costs of the admission process are not recorded separately.

Prostitution

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new initiatives he is assessing to target those who exploit prostitutes and live on their earnings. [18490]

Mr. Maclean: We are not, at present, considering any fresh initiatives to target those who exploit prostitutes. The Government's position remains that those living off the sexual exploitation of others should be dealt with severely. My right hon. and learned Friend recently announced his intention to undertake a review of the

current maximum penalties for sexual offence, which includes offences relating to those who exploit and live on the earnings of prostitutes.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the strategy adopted by the chief constable of Nottingham to deal with those who exploit prostitutes. [18491]

Mr. Maclean: We welcome the recent agreement between Nottinghamshire constabulary and Nottinghamshire social services on how best to tackle the problem of child prostitution. It is too early to assess how successful the agreement has been, but the Government firmly support a multi-agency approach as the best way of addressing child prostitution and ensuring that children and youngsters receive the care and protection they deserve. The need for co-operation between the agencies working in this area is reflected in the joint Home Office and Department of Health guidance, "Working together under the Children Act 1989".

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussion he has had with the Association of Chief Police Officers regarding street prostitution. [18489]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has not discussed street prostitution in his regular meetings with the Association of Chief Police Officers, but officials have been discussing a multi-agency approach to child prostitution with ACPO and discuss other issues with the police as matters arise.

Handguns

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if those owners of prohibited high calibre handguns who wish to retain their weapons as mementos, having first arranged for de-activation and having obtained de-activation certificates, will be able to obtain compensation based on individual valuation of the weapon in its original state. [18615]

Miss Widdecombe: No. Under the terms of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, payments in respect of high calibre handguns may be made only where such items are surrendered to the police.

Convicted Murderers

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average sentence served by convicted murderers released in the last five years. [18477]

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is as follows:

Average time served under sentence by murderers first released on life licence from Prison Service establishments, 1992 to 1996.

	Sentence
1992	12.4 years
1993	14.4 years
1994	15.4 years
1995	14.0 years
1996	[1]13.4 years
1992 to 1996	14.0 years

[1] Provisional.

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted murderers have killed again after release from prison in the last 10 years; and what is the average sentence that they serve as a result. [18478]

Mr. Maclean: In England and Wales, during the years 1986 to 1995, nine persons released from prison after having served a sentence following conviction for murder are known to have killed again.

One of these persons subsequently committed suicide. The other eight were sentenced to life imprisonment.

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to *(a)* review the sentencing policy for those convicted of murder and *(b)* introduce different categories of murder. [18479]

Mr. Maclean: The Government have no plans to review either the sentence for, or the offence of, murder.

Special Constabulary

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average of recruitment for regular police force officers recruited from the special constabulary; [18486]

(2) if he will list the percentage of regular *(a)* male and *(b)* female police officers recruited from the special constabulary for each year since 1990 for each police force; [18485]

(3) what is the average length of service for *(a)* regular police force officers and *(b)* the special constabulary. [18487]

Mr. Maclean: Recruitment of regular police officers and officers to the special constabulary in England and Wales is a matter for the chief officer of each police force. The information requested is not collated centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by contacting each force.

Bridgewater Three

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what Government assistance is being offered to Michael Hickey, Vincent Hickey and James Robinson to help them overcome the psychological traumas typically associated with the experience they have undergone. [18564]

Mr. Kirkhope: If the convictions in this case are quashed, it will be open to the men concerned to apply to my right hon. and learned Friend for compensation from public funds. In the meantime, we are in touch with the Department of Health and the men's solicitor to ensure that any health care needs can be assessed without delay.

Prison Ship, Portland Harbour

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the costs incurred to date by Dorset police authority as a consequence of proposals to moor a prison ship in Portland harbour. [18745]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the chief constable that the Dorset police have incurred expenditure totalling £2,646 on police contingency planning on this matter.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his Department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18932]

Mr. Howard: Table 5.5 of the Red Book shows capital investment by the private sector. The breakdown of Home Office private finance initiative schemes as identified in that table is:

	1997–98 £ million	*1998–99 £ million*	*1999–2000 £ million*
Bridgend Prison	37.0	0	0
Fazakerley Prison	37.0	0	0
Immigration and Nationality Directorate caseworking information technology system	21.0	0	0
Lowdham Grange Prison	24.0	0	0
Home Office Large Major Enquiry system II (information technology system)	0.5	0	0
Cookham Wood (secure training centre)	6.0	0	0
Gringley (secure training centre)	10.0	0	0
Medomsley (secure training centre)	5.0	5	0
Onley (secure training centre)	5.0	5	0
Secure training centre 5	5.0	5	0
Design, Construct, Manage and Finance 3 (Prison)	6.0	37	37
Design, Construct, Manage and Finance 4 (Prison)	0.0	6	37
Immigration and Nationality Directorate Detention accommodation (South East District)	1.0	0	0
Immigration and Nationality Directorate Detention accommodation (Heathrow)	0.0	14	0
Home Office SW1 Estate	10.0	30	10
Prisons/boilerhouses	9.0	3	0
Prisons/kitchens	8.0	0	0
Prisons/health centres	3.0	0	0
Prisons major refurbishments	12.0	12	0
Prisons/other	2.0	0	0
Prisons/health information technology	0.0	6	0
Public Safety Radio Communications Project	0.0	10	40
Total	201.5	133	124
These totals rounded in the Financial Statement and Budget Report	200.0	130	120

Police Officers

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in 1979; and how many there are at the present time. [18940]

Mr. Maclean: I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply given to our hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) on 23 January, *Official Report*, column *731*.

Charities (Criminal Record Checks)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 3 March, *Official Report*, column *463*, in respect of charges for criminal records checks on those volunteering to assist charities, when he intends to make money available to cover the costs. [18919]

Mr. Maclean: We will consider granting free checks to specific groups, such as volunteers, when resources permit.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18805]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *506–7*.

Belmarsh Prison

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list his reasons for refusing to release a prisoner form Her Majesty's prison Belmarsh, ref. KF 3842, on compassionate grounds. [18922]

Miss Widdecombe: I will write to the hon. Member.

Fire Service College

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he proposes to take to assist the Fire Service College in improving its financial performance. [19480]

Mr. Howard: The Fire Service College, as the central training establishment for the fire service, makes a very important contribution to promoting effective and efficient firefighting and fire safety arrangements in the United Kingdom, and thus maintaining public safety. Its financial regime and targets need to assist it to continue to discharge this role effectively and to secure value for money, but the present arrangements are not achieving this. Despite the considerable efforts of the present management team, the college has not yet been able to realise the benefits which its position as a trading fund ought to offer.

The college's corporate aim is to remain the pre-eminent higher education college for fire-related training and for promoting fire safety awareness. To help secure the future of the college and to assist it in achieving its corporate and business objectives, I have therefore decided to make changes to its present financial structure. I propose to seek parliamentary approval for the payment of a grant of £13.5 million to the college. This will enable it immediately to pay off the deemed loan part of the originating capital debt when it was established as a

trading fund in 1992. It will save the college £1.3 million in annual interest payments. I also propose in 1997–98 to pay to the college a separate grant of £1.3 million so that it can continue to provide essential training courses for the fire service.

These measures will make a step change in the college's finances. They demonstrate the Government's firm commitment to securing an effective and well trained fire service, but the future success of the college should not—and cannot—be dependent on the Government alone. It is crucially dependent on the support of its fire service customers and the college's own efforts. Fire authorities must continue to be willing to make a proper investment in the training of their brigades and to take advantage of the facilities, skills and high-quality training opportunities the college is able to offer. The college has to give priority to ensuring the training needs of the fire service are clearly identified and effectively met. It should exploit innovative training developments. It must also continue its programme of improvements in business efficiency, to ensure high quality management and financial control and so that any on-going requirement for assistance through Home Office grant can progressively be reduced.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

UN Security Council Resolutions

Mr. Temple-Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs upon how many occasions since Britain joined the European Community *(a)* Britain and France and *(b)* Britain and the United States have voted differently on proposed UN Security Council resolutions; and on which of those occasions the resolution referred to a country in which British forces were on active service or were about to undertake such service. [18433]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: According to records kept by this Department, the United Kingdom and France have voted differently on UN Security Council resolutions on 35 occasions since 1973. The United Kingdom and the United States have voted differently on 74 occasions within the same period. The only occasions on which the resolution referred to, or where British forces were involved in or were about to be involved in, active military operations were:

June 1982: Falklands (draft S/15156:Rev 2).

November 1984: N Cyprus (SCR 550).

The resolution on the Falkland Islands was subsequently vetoed and therefore never adopted.

Gulf War

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the compensation for victims of the Gulf war, decided on by the United Nations Compensation Commission's governing council in December 1996, will be paid. [18728]

Dr. Liam Fox: Interim payments of US $2,500 will be made after similar amounts have been paid for claims approved in 1994, 1995 and earlier in 1996. Successful claimants in the first instalments are due to be paid in the near future.

Subsequent payments will depend on a regular flow of money into the compensation fund from the sale of Iraqi oil under UN Security Council resolution 986.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Nations' announcement on the use of seized Iraqi assets to pay for the environmental effects of the Gulf war and its implications for the United Kingdom. [18727]

Dr. Liam Fox: The UN Compensation Commission recently announced that claims for environmental damage totalling US $32 billion have been received from 10 Governments by the deadline of 1 February 1997. Compensation will in due courses be paid from revenue derived from the sale of Iraqi oil, not from seized assets. The UK has claimed £1.4 million.

Albania

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *578–79*, if he will list the *(a)* British and *(b)* Albanian organisations, individuals or firms in receipt of know-how fund money covering (i) advice on setting up investment funds and (ii) pre-investment feasibility studies. [18986]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The know-how fund contracted the British firm GMA Capital Markets Ltd. to advise on setting up and regulating the Tirana stock exchange and investment funds in Albania. The KHF gave no money to any Albanian organisation, individual or firm, support being provided through funding the cost of technical assistance for specific projects.

The British companies who have received money under the pre-investment feasibility studies scheme for prospective investment in Albania are:

Anglo Albanian Mining (Heritage House)

Hugh MacRae and Co. (Builders) Ltd.

Peter Streatfield

Eng-Alb Trading Company.

In each of these cases, following the receipt of a grant under the PIFS scheme, the investment by the British company has proceeded. No money was paid to any Albanian organisation, individual or firm through this scheme.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18803]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the information given by the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *506–7*.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his Department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18924]

Mr. Hanley: This Department, including the Overseas Development Administration, has agreed two PFI projects: Minerva, a small information technology system to archive electronic documents, and a vehicle services project initially for a small number of overseas posts. Projects have been advertised for the new Berlin embassy and accommodation in Beirut, Colombo, Lagos, Kiev and Sofia. Table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" reflects this Department's estimate of likely capital investment under these projects. In addition, this Department has invited interest in a project to provide a new global telecommunications system. A breakdown by project would be commercially sensitive at this stage.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Chancery Bank

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the procedures followed by the DTI, the Treasury and the Bank of England, in respect of the voluntary liquidation of Chancery bank; and if he will make a statement. [18704]

Mr. John M. Taylor: On 5 August 1993, my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), announced the appointment of inspectors under section 432(2) of the Companies Act 1985 to investigate and report on the affairs of Chancery plc.

The appointment followed the appointment of administrators on 18 February 1991 and a subsequent voluntary arrangement approved by creditors.

The inspectors have not completed the report of their investigation, and I am unable to comment further until they have done so.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his Department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18936]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The figures in table 5.5 of the Red Book are the combined estimates of the level of private sector investment for the following planned projects: the Teddington site re-development, housing the National Physical Laboratory; resource accounting and budgeting; the Radiocommunications Agency's IS-IT strategic partnership; the Coal Authority's IT system for mining and surface damage reports—contract now signed; and three small IT projects in the DTI. Disaggregated figures are commercially sensitive at this stage.

Undischarged Bankrupts

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many undischarged bankrupts there are in each county in England. [19298]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is not held in this form. The Insolvency Act 1986 provides for the majority of bankrupts to be discharged automatically after three years or after two years in smaller, summary cases. The number of individuals against whom bankruptcy orders were made in the last three years for which figures are available were:

1993: 31,016

1994: 25,634

1995: 21,993.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures were available. [18807]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *506–7*. Additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Birmingham (Ministerial Visit)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of his visit to Birmingham on 17 February. [18423]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 3 March 1997]:* The cost of the Birmingham business breakfast was approximately £14,000. More than 700 business men and women attended it.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Medical Training

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the total number of entrants to medical school in each of the last five years, indicating the number of graduates. [18602]

Mr. Forth: The information available is as follows:

Number of full-time home-domiciled[1] entrants to first degree medicine/dentistry courses

	Total number of entrants	*Graduate entrants*[3]	*Non-graduate entrants*[3]	*Qualification not known*[3]
1991–92	4,733	—	—	—
1992–93	4,883	—	—	—
1993–94	4,957	—	—	—
1994–95[2]	5,924	253	4,701	970
1995–96[2]	6,496	362	4,854	1,280

[1] Based on students who were in their first year of study.

[2] Figures collected on a new basis and not directly comparable with earlier years' figures.

[3] Figures prior to 1994–95 cannot be split between graduate and non-graduate entrants.

In addition, there were 474 full-time overseas entrants to first degree medicine and dentistry courses in the UK in 1994–95, of whom 18 were known graduates, and 634 in 1995–96, of whom 47 were known graduates.

National Curriculum (Drug Awareness)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has made, or is considering, to the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority on the drug awareness component of the life skills part of the national curriculum. [18955]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend has made no such representations. She will consider any recommendations from SCAA on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of the curriculum in due course.

Drug Education

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has made to the other Departments since 26 February on the drug abuse resistance education scheme. [18956]

Mrs. Gillan: I wrote on Monday 3 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department to bring his attention to the debate on DARE of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *397–410*. I copied my letter to my right hon. Friend the Lord President.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will study the evaluation of DARE by North Nottinghamshire Health Promotion. [18957]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend would welcome the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will call for a report from the Nottinghamshire county council on its secondary school booster scheme for DARE. [18959]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. Any information Nottinghamshire county council chooses to offer the Department will be received with interest.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action she has taken to extend the DARE scheme. [18954]

Mrs. Gillan: Decisions on approaches to drug education remain a matter for individual schools.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the oral statement of the Lord President of the Council on 26 February, *Official Report*, columns *401–2*, what is her response to the questions raised by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North regarding the DARE scheme. [18960]

Mrs. Gillan: I sought to set out my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State's response to those questions during the debate. Broadly, while my right hon. Friend remains interested in the progress of the DARE programme in Nottinghamshire, she does not intend to promote or endorse one particular approach to drug education in schools above the many others that are serving our teachers and young people well in their particular circumstances.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will write to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North giving her view on the Office for Standards in Education report on drug education. [18958]

Mrs. Gillan: Yes.

Office for Standards in Education

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment who is responsible for inspecting those appointed by Ofsted; and what proposals she has to improve the supervision of Ofsted appointees. [18820]

Mr. Robin Squire: Ofsted is a Government department headed by the chief inspector of schools, who is responsible for appointing and registering inspectors. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which her Department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18926]

Mr. Robin Squire: Table 5.5 shows the estimated capital spending through the private finance initiative in the Department's and Employment Service's own estates and infrastructure. As the estimate is based on the aggregate potential for PFI in these areas, it is not yet directly attributable to specific projects, other than those which have already been concluded. So far, these are two Employment Service computer projects: Employment Service communications and guidance system and windows integrated system for personnel.

PRIME MINISTER

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, columns *419–20*, if he will put forward proposals for a bilateral extradition agreement between the United Kingdom and Libya. [18735]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 5 March 1997]:* No. The United Nations Security Council decided that Libya must surrender the accused for trial in Scotland or the USA.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his engagements for Thursday 6 March. [17885]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 March. [17886]

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Organophosphates

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister from what date information was available to any Government Department about the dangers to health from the use of organophosphates; what action was then taken to ensure that all Departments considering their use were made conversant with the dangers; and if he will make a statement. [18824]

The Prime Minister: Organophosphates were first investigated for use as insecticides in the 1930s in Germany. Since then, information on the health effects of OPs has accumulated over time. Much of the information is in peer-reviewed scientific journals, books or World Health Organisation publications and is therefore available to all Government Departments as well as to the general public.

Government Departments receive advice and information on a regular and on-going basis about OPs and their possible effects on human health from a number of sources both external and internal. OP compounds have been reviewed on many occasions, including the independent expert committees which advise the Government on pesticides and veterinary products. They have not recommended a ban or suspension of the use of this class of compounds.

Governor-General Visits

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if he will recommend that an invitation be issued to *(a)* the Governor-General of Australia, *(b)* the Governor-General of Canada and *(c)* the Governor-General of New Zealand to make a visit to the United Kingdom of equivalent status to a state visit. [18013]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* No.

TREASURY

Earth Summit II

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what preparations his Department is making for earth summit II, and for the preparatory conferences leading up to the summit. [18496]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Department of the Environment is taking the lead within Government on the preparations for the UN General Assembly special session in June and I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Minister for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), gave him on 5 March 1997, *Official Report*, column *634*.

Pension Plans

Mr. Olner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the net present value of savings made from reduced expenditure on tax relief paid on contributions made to appropriate personal pensions in *(a)* 2025, *(b)* 2030, *(c)* 2040 and *(d)* 2050, if (i) all and (ii) half of those earning under £10,000 per annum who are currently opted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme into APPs were to rejoin SERPS. [15591]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* The yield from reduced expenditure on tax relief for minimum contributions from the national insurance fund to appropriate personal pensions is tentatively estimated at about £10 million for 2025–26 and 2030–31, and negligible by 2040–41, if all holders of APPs with earnings of under £10,000 per annum were to rejoin SERPS, and about half these amounts if half of those were to rejoin SERPS. The figures are at 1996–97 prices and have been discounted.

The costing assumes that these APP holders in 1996–97 would otherwise continue as APP holders over the projected period. In addition, they are assumed to have the same earnings in these future years in real terms as they did in the base year.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mr. David Kyle

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General what role Mr. David Kyle played in preparing the Crown case in *(a)* the 1989 appeal of the men convicted of killing Carl Bridgewater and *(b)* the 1987 and 1991 appeals of the six people convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings. [18255]

The Attorney-General: Mr. David Kyle played no part in preparing the Crown case in the 1989 appeal of the men convicted of killing Carl Bridgewater. He also played no such part in relation to the 1987 appeal by the six people convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings. In relation to the 1991 appeal by these persons, the preparation of the Crown case was undertaken within the special casework division of what was then Crown Prosecution Service headquarters casework. Mr. Kyle was head of division at that time and in that capacity had supervisory responsibility for all cases dealt with on his division.

Ms Fiona King

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General what role Ms Fiona King played in preparing the Crown case in *(a)* the 1989 appeal of the three men convicted of killing Carl Bridgewater and *(b)* the 1987 and 1991 appeals of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings. [18257]

The Attorney-General: Miss Fiona King is away, but examination of her postings indicate that she has at no time been assigned to any part of the Crown Prosecution Service which had responsibility for preparing the Crown case in the 1989 appeal of the men convicted of killing Carl Bridgewater or in the 1987 and 1991 appeals of the six people convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Attorney-General what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18818]

The Attorney-General: I refer to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *506–07*. Additional or more recent information is as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service: 97.3 per cent. of bills were paid within agreed terms or 30 days during June to November 1996.

Serious Fraud Office: 91.3 per cent. of bills were paid within agreed terms or 30 days from April 1996 to date'.

Treasury Solicitor's Department: 93.7 per cent. of bills were paid within agreed terms or 30 days during June 1996 to January 1997.

Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers: 95.7 per cent. of bills were paid within 30 days during June 1996 to February 1997.

Government Property Lawyers: 99.5 per cent. of bills were paid within 30 days during April 1996 to January 1997.

' Provisional figure.

DEFENCE

Psychological Operations Units

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many psychological operations units are established in the field army; how many personnel are assigned to these units; and what are his plans to expand or establish additional units for this role. [17987]

Mr. Soames: We have one psychological operations unit, to which two personnel are assigned permanently to provide instruction in the psychological operations role. This unit can be expanded when required. These arrangements are currently under review.

Military Provost Guard Service

Mr. George: To ask the secretary of State for Defence how many applications have been received to date for posts in the Military Provost Guard Service; how many individuals have been recruited to the Military Provost Guard Service; how many individuals have completed their training satisfactorily; what is the proposed Military Provost Guard Service complement, broken down by rank, for *(a)* Chicksands, *(b)* Chilwell, *(c)* Donnington and *(d)* Wilton; what is the rent which the Military Provost Guard Service staff will pay for their accommodation; and what services are provided for this rent. [18104]

Mr. Soames: Recruitment to the Military Provost Guard Service is proceeding satisfactorily. Some 507 statements of interest in the 118 MPGS pilot scheme posts have been received; 47 candidates have been attested to date and there are firm candidates for all but a few of the remaining posts. There have been no training failures. I have decided to withhold the details of the complements at individual sites under exemption 1 of the code of practice on access to government information, relating to defence, security and industrial relations. MPGS soldiers recruited to the pilot scheme will pay the same charges for service married and single quarters as general service personnel and will receive the same services.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date it was decided that the British forces involved in the liberation of Kuwait would take supplies of organophosphates to the Gulf for use as pesticides; when they were first used there; what additional supplies were purchased locally; when these additional supplies were used; and what checks were made about the safety of these additional pesticides before they were used. [18823]

Mr. Soames: Full details of what is now known about the use of organophosphate pesticides by British Service personnel during the Gulf war are contained in the organophosphate pesticide investigation team report which was published on 10 December 1996. A copy of this report was also placed in the Library of the House.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the extent of the outbreak and the period that MRSA was present at the Cambridge military hospital, Aldershot, the numbers of patients involved and whether it contributed to or caused death. [18992]

Mr. Soames: During the period from 1 to 25 May 1994, the Cambridge military hospital experienced a widespread infection of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus. The strain of MRSA was unusual in that it was characterised by a rapid rate of spread but with low virulence. No patient at the hospital developed symptoms of MRSA infection, although a number became colonised with the organism.

The outbreak was rapidly and aggressively controlled. There were no admissions to the hospital between 16 and 24 May 1994. All hospital staff were screened for MRSA and, as the outbreak was widespread, were treated with an antibiotic. A thorough disinfection programme was carried out in the hospital. No evidence of MRSA was found in the hospital after 25 May 1994.

There are no indications that this outbreak of MRSA contributed to, or caused, death among patients at the hospital.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his Department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18927]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The figures in table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" represent my Department's estimates of capital spending by the private sector under private finance initiative projects that had been agreed by October 1996. The projects include:

White vehicles in Germany

Army logistic information systems agency

RAF white vehicles

Training administration and financial management information systems

Naval recruiting and training agency

HMS Nelson facilities management

Mechanical handling equipment vehicles.

For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it would be inappropriate to reveal details of these estimates against individual projects. I am, therefore, withholding this information under exemption 13 of the code of practice on access to Government information.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18819]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 17 December 1996, columns *506–7* by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmonds (Mr. Spring). Additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Joint Services Command and Staff College

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at the time Ministers took decisions on the future of command and staff training what contribution that reorganisation was expected to make to the overall annual savings from 1996–97 arising from the defence costs study; what is the total cost in 1996–97 of those parts of single service command and staff training which will eventually be replaced by the joint services command and staff college; and what is his estimate of the costs of the JSCSC in 1997–98 and 1999–2000. [17057]

Mr. Soames: The proposals to form a joint services command and staff college was initially put forward in the "Front Line First" studies. These constituted internal departmental advice to Ministers, the details of which I am withholding under exemption 2 of the code of practice on access to Government information. Financial information at this stage was indicative only.

The decision to implement the JSCSC was based primarily on the operational need for enhanced joint training. Some savings were initially suggested but were on the basis of considerably reduced student numbers, which subsequent analysis found to be unrealistic.

The JSCSC came into being on 1 January 1997—part way through the financial year 1996–97—which also makes the year a typical in course programme terms. Accurate costs for the three single service colleges and the joint service defence college at Greenwich, even for the previous year, 1995–96, are not available because the MOD's cash accounting system does not enable a wide range of support costs to be disaggregated from larger sums covering more than one establishment, such as Camberley and Sandhurst, or from sums covering more than one function at the same location, as was the case at Greenwich. This should be addressed by the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting.

The estimated cost of the JSCSC in 1997–98 is £30 million. This applies to the JSCSC at its interim sites, mainly Bracknell, and for reasons similar to those given above is likely still to be slightly underestimated; 1999–00 is also atypical because the move from the interim to the permanent site is due to take place during the summer of 1999. The first full year of operation at the permanent site will be 2000–01 for which estimated costs, for the facilities and services provided by the contractor as well as MOD-provided teaching and directing staff, are also approximately £30 million.

DERA (Support Services Division)

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to complete the sale of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency's support services division; what are the reasons behind the delay in completion of the sale; if APAX Partners has agreed bulk transfer terms for staff pensions with the Government Actuary's Department; and what bulk transfer terms for staff pensions were agreed in previous privatisations of Ministry of Defence services or agencies. [18107]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We have not yet been able to reach agreement on acceptable terms with APAX and have, therefore, decided to open negotiations with CinVen, the other financial institution that was on the original shortlist. We will conclude a deal only if and when mutually satisfactory terms have been agreed. I expect to have come to a decision within a matter of days rather than weeks.

Regarding staff pensions, there will now have to be further negotiations with CinVen over bulk transfer terms. Previous MOD organisations have generally involved an agreement on this issue and I hope that the offer of similar terms will prove acceptable.

NATO Strategic Concept

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans NATO has to revise and update its strategic concept. [18722]

Mr. Soames: NATO's strategic concept was adopted by Alliance Heads of Government at their meeting in Rome in November 1991. NATO's strategy has evolved since then in the light of changes in the European security situation, and this process will continue. Whether the strategic concept itself should be updated to take account of those changes is under consideration within NATO. Any decision to update the strategic concept would be a matter for NATO Ministers.

TRANSPORT

Salisbury Bypass

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his proposals for the Salisbury bypass. [18902]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport announced on 29 October 1996 that they were minded to confirm the orders to authorise construction of the bypass. However, before reaching a final decision, they have afforded interested parties an opportunity to make representations on the effects of induced traffic and alteration of a section of the proposed route to take it away from housing at Harnham, as recommended by the inspector who held the year-long public inquiry. They also instructed the

Highways Agency to review three matters: the possibility of realigning the section of the route across the River Avon floodplain, south of Salisbury, to avoid the newly designated east Harnham meadows SSSI; the scope for further mitigating the landscape impact of the bypass in this sensitive area; and the need for any measures in addition to those already proposed to mitigate the potential impact of the bypass on the proposed River Avon special area of conservation. The Highways Agency report on the reviews has just been received and will now be considered by my right hon. Friends.

Rail Employment

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total number of people employed by British Rail before the start of the privatisation process; and if he will estimate the number employed on the railways at the current time. [19004]

Mr. Watts: On 31 March 1994, the British Railways Board employed 121,052 people. The latest available estimate of the total number employed in the railway industry is 94,600 people employed in September 1996.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his Department is responsible as identified in Table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18937]

Mr. Watts: The figures underlying table 5.5 relate to expected expenditure on the following PFI projects.

Italicised entries denote projects not yet signed.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

CAA New Scottish Centre

CAA Oceanic Flight Data Processing System

Croydon Tramlink

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

DBFO roads (first eight schemes)

DBFO roads (tranche 2)

Highways Agency pavement management system

Heathrow Express

LT "connect" (Communications)

LT Power

LT "Prestige" (Ticketing)

Midland Metro

Northern Line trains.

Details of individual projects are commercially sensitive.

Railfreight Distribution

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total amount payable to Her Majesty's Government for the sale of Railfreight Distribution. [19003]

Mr. Watts: The British Railways Board has yet to finalise the sale of Railfreight Distribution.

Ferry Safety

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to stage a trial evacuation of 1,000 passengers from a roll-on/roll-off ferry in realistic conditions. [18771]

Mr. Bowis: None, since "realistic conditions" would imply damage to the ship and potential injury to the participants.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18808]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Economic Secretary on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *506–7*. Any additional information can be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Channel Tunnel

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is *(a)* the fastest time the channel tunnel has been evacuated; *(b)* how many doors in the tunnel were open during that exercise; and *(c)* if the air fell to the point where it equalised between the central tunnel and the running tunnels. [19009]

Mr. Watts: *(a)* 85 minutes timed from the train coming to a stop until passengers reached the open air. *(b)* A maximum of three cross passage doors were open on this occasion. *(c)* No.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the present normal working pressure of the central service tunnel in the channel tunnel; and how many doors can be opened before the pressure equalises between all three tunnels. [19007]

Mr. Watts: The pressure in the service tunnel is maintained within a range from 2,000 pascals near the ventilation shafts to 500 pascals at the midpoint. No more than three cross passage doors should be open if overpressure is to be maintained in the service tunnel.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new semi-open wagons have been purchased for use in the channel tunnel since 1 January; and what evaluation has been made of their safety case. [19010]

Mr. Watts: No semi-open wagons have been purchased since 1 January.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if there was smoke in either of the two tunnels not affected by fire during the channel tunnel fire of November 1996. [19008]

Mr. Watts: Details of the behaviour of smoke in the channel tunnel fire in November 1996 are being investigated by the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority and will be contained in the authority's report on the fire. I understand that this will be completed shortly.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the French Government about the channel tunnel fire of November 1996. [18653]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The intergovernmental commission meets on a regular basis to discuss the operation of the channel tunnel on behalf of the Governments. The Channel Tunnel Safety Authority also meets regularly.

The heavy goods vehicle shuttle fire on the 18 November has been discussed at each of the meetings held by these bodies since November 1996.

In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has corresponded with the French Transport Minister, Bernard Pons, about the fire.

Departmental Revenue Hypothecation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement regarding the hypothecation of revenue from his Department. [19002]

Mr. Bowis: Proceeds of asset sales do sometimes go to the Department concerned. The proposed privatisation of London Underground is, however, the first time this approach has been adopted in a privatisation. This is in recognition of the particular needs and circumstances of London Underground.

British Railways Board

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has set the British Railways Board an external finance limit consistent with his latest estimate of its outturn for 1996–97. [19413]

Mr. Watts: I have today set the British Railways Board an external finance limit of £10 million for 1996–97. This limit is consistent with the estimate of 1996–97 outturn provision for the railway industry of £780 million announced by my right hon. Friend in his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) of 26 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *160*.

Lorry Weights

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has reached a decision on maximum lorry weights following the closure of the period for responses to the Government's consultation document on lorry weights. [19539]

Mr. Watts: We have received some 250 responses to the document; these are being considered very carefully and the issues involved will be analysed extensively. Until that work is complete, there can be no decision on altering the present general maximum lorry weight, but the separate proposal put forward in the consultation document to allow lorries engaged in piggyback road-rail operations to operate at up to 44 tonnes, if they have six axles and road-friendly suspension, has been generally welcomed as a measure to get more long-distance freight onto rail. I have therefore asked officials to proceed with the necessary consultation on draft regulations to put this into effect. Subject to the outcome of that consultation, I expect the regulations to be laid shortly. This decision is independent of the outcome of the Government's consideration of the general maximum lorry weight.

Light Dues

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on light dues. [19540]

Sir George Young: I am pleased to announce that light dues for 1997–98 will be reduced by about 4.6 per cent. from 43p to 41p net ton with consequential reductions to other changes. This reduction, coming after four years of stability, takes rates back to below those established in 1992. It is a clear demonstration of the increasing efficiency of the three general lighthouse authorities.

I am announcing changes to the light dues regulations which are designed to simplify some aspects of collection and will remove the liability to pay light dues in certain cases. I shall be consulting the industries concerned on other possible changes in the distribution of light dues.

Train Track Fences

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents involving trains have occurred in each of the past five years as a result of people gaining access to the track through damaged fences. [18239]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* This information is not available in the form requested. However, appendix 8B of "Railway Safety—HM Chief Inspector of Railways' Annual Report on the safety record of the railways in Great Britain for 1995–96", gives statistics on the number of trespassers killed and injured for the past five years. The figures are included in the table:

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Trespassers	150 (7)	132 (5)	121 (7)	119 (6)	109 (7)
Suicides	150 (1)	132 (0)	141 (1)	135 (0)	137 (0)
Total	300 (8)	264 (5)	262 (8)	254 (6)	246 (7)

1. Figures in brackets denote the number of children under the age of 16 years included in the total.

2. Figures for 1994–95 and 1995–96 have been revised following notification of coroners' verdicts for inquests that have been outstanding at the time the previous statistics had been prepared. Figures for 1995–96 are provisional.

The report also highlights accidents to trespassers and measures the inspectorate, the industry and the British transport police are adopting to combat these accidents. Copies of the report are available in both Libraries of the House.

The state of fencing is not recorded as a contributory factor on the Health and Safety Executive's accident database. In addition, the state of the fencing is not always mentioned on the written notifications of incidents received by the HSE from railway operators. However, during any HSE investigations of incidents involving trespassers, and in particular incidents involving children, the condition of the fencing will be scrutinised closely and enforcement action taken should HSE consider the fencing to be inadequate.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17060]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Financial year	*Number of individual items (including information technology)*	*Total value*
1995–96	409	£375,354

1. For the purposes of departmental accounting, centralised information is collected for complete financial years and in a single category covering losses arising from theft, fraud, arson, sabotage or other causes.

2. The figures in the table are for the Department and all its agencies.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many former service personnel who participated in the nuclear tests programmes in Australia and the south Pacific have been awarded war pensions after they developed *(a)* leukaemia, excluding chronic lymphatic or *(b)* multiple myeloma; when was the first time that former service personnel were awarded war pensions after developing these illnesses; and if he will make a statement. [17952]

Mr. Heald: The information is as follows:

Awards made in respect of leukaemia (excluding chronic lymphatic leukaemia)

Four war disablement pensions and seven war widows' pensions.

Awards made in respect of multiple myeloma

Ten war disablement pensions and three war widows' pensions.

The first awards were made in 1988 following publication of the National Radiological Protection Board's first report on the subsequent health of nuclear test participants. The report did not causally relate multiple myeloma or leukaemia to participation, but its evidence was regarded as raising a reasonable doubt—the standard of proof required for the award of war pension in such cases—that those conditions excluding chronic lymphatic leukaemia, may have resulted from participation in the tests.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many jobseeker's allowance cases have gone to appeal; and what percentage of these have been successful. [17855]

Mr. Roger Evans: Some 4,460 jobseeker's allowance appeals have been received by the Independent Tribunal Service and, of those appeals cleared at hearing, 36.5 per cent. have been successful.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the locations of the meteorological stations on the basis of whose readings eligibility for cold weather payments are determined for each part of Wales, and if each case its *(a)* height above sea level and *(b)* proximity to the coast. [18508]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Weather station	*Height above mean sea level (metres)*	*Proximity to coastline (kilometres)*
Aberporth	133	less than 5
Capel Curig	216	[1]40
Crosby	9	less than 5
Great Malvern	44	[1]60
Mumbles Head	32	less than 5
Rhoose	65	less than 5
Rhyl	77	less than 5
Sennybridge	307	[1]30
Shawbury	72	[1]60
Valley	10	less than 5

[1] Rounded to the nearest 10 kilometres.

Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effect the Social Security (Adjudication) and Child Support Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1996 on the number of oral hearings held by social security appeal tribunals, disability appeal tribunals and child support appeal tribunals; and what information he has collated on the effect they have already had. [18373]

Mr. Roger Evans: An evaluation of the impact of the Social Security (Adjudication) and Child Support Amendment (No. 2) Regulations which came in to force on 21 October 1996 will be carried out over the first year of operation. Information is being collected and we expect to have interim results approximately six months after implementation.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list how many men made contributions to *(a)* contracted-out pension schemes by scheme type and *(b)* the state earnings-related pension scheme in the latest year for which figures are available. [18721]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

It is estimated that in 1991, the latest date for which information is available, there were approximately 5.9 million men in contributory contracted-out occupational pension schemes.

The number of men with appropriate personal pensions is estimated to be 3.4 million in 1991–92 and 3.6 million in 1994–95.

The total number of men accruing unabated SERPS entitlement is estimated to be 3.5 million in 1991–92 and 3.4 million in 1993–94, the latest date for which information is available.

Source:

Government Actuary's survey of occupational pension schemes 1991.

War Pensions (Gulf War)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make arrangements for an urgent review of war pension claims made by ex-service men and women who were exposed to the effects of the use of organophosphates during service in the Gulf war. [18825]

Mr. Heald: No. Under the war pensions scheme, the initial onus is on the claimant to show disablement. Where disablement has been shown to exist, present medical evidence does not support a causal relation to exposure to organophosphates. Present medical understanding is that exposure would result in symptoms arising in close time relation. Many claims made as a result of service in the Gulf, however, are made in respect of symptoms which arose several years after service ended.

Nevertheless, where disablement has been shown and where the claim is made within seven years of termination of service, because the onus is on the Secretary of State to show beyond reasonable doubt that disablement is not attributable to service, unless there is a clear non-service cause of disablement, war pensions have been, and will continue to be awarded.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18806]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *506–7* by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring).

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18935]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 13 January, *Official Report*, column *149*.

The private finance initiative schemes in table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" include the national insurance recording system 2, Newcastle estate development, the Benefits Agency—Post Office Counters Ltd.), access to corporate data and private sector resource initiative for management of the estate projects.

State Pensions

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the additional cost of linking state pensions to average earnings in Wales during the last five years. [17876]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer Thursday 27 February]:* The information is in the table.

£ million

Year	*Gross additional cost of uprating basic retirement pensions by average earnings in Wales*	*Net additional cost of uprating basic retirement pensions by average earnings in Wales*
1992–93	49	36
1993–94	85	61
1994–95	87	62
1995–96	119	86
1996–97	109	80

Sources:

1. The numbers in receipt of basic retirement pension and the average amount received have been estimated based on a 5 per cent. sample of live cases—10 per cent. in 1992–93 and 1993–94.

2. Earnings growth in Wales has been estimated by the Office for National Statistics, using the new earnings survey.

Notes:

1. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £1 million.

2. The NES is calculated in April each year and the figures have been adjusted to provide figures for September allowing a comparison with the September retail prices index that is used for uprating RP. The NES figures have been adjusted by taking the ratio of the NES increase from April to April and the average earnings index April to April increases and multiplying this by the AEI increases from April to September. The headline AEI whole economy figure is used.

3. The gross expenditure is estimated by calculating the percentage increase in standard basic RP and then applying this percentage increase to the actual total expenditure on RP in Wales.

4. The net expenditure takes account of income related benefits that would otherwise have been paid. The offset ratios have been calculated using the policy simulation model which is based on information from the family expenditure survey. For 1992–93, the 1993–94 offset ratio has been applied.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Anglo-Irish Secretariat

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the religious breakdown of those public appointments made each year since 1986 on the proposal of the Irish side of the Anglo-Irish Secretariat. [17703]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is not available.

Water Cannon

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many times water cannons have been used by the security forces in Northern Ireland since 1967; for what reasons they were used; on what dates they were used; in what places they were used; and if the security forces are currently authorised to use water cannons. [17951]

Sir John Wheeler: It is not possible to provide details of the use of water cannons in Northern Ireland as no separate statistical records of their use were kept at the time. It is believed they were last used around 1970.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary is authorised to use "reasonable force" in situations of public disorder, which could include the use of water cannons. The force does not, however, hold any water cannons and has not done so for some years.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his Department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18929]

Sir John Wheeler: The following table gives a breakdown of the Northern Ireland figures, which are the best estimate of what NI Departments expect to be agreed. The list is subject to variation as project time scales may change, new projects may arise and some of those listed may not be taken forward if they fail the value for money test.

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Bangor and Kinnegar sewerage treatment works	7	6	4
Hydro electric project	1	—	—
Westlink urban motorway	—	—	10
Motorway emergency telephone system	—	4	—
Strangford ferry replacement	—	3	—
Accommodation Holywood road, social security office	—	3	—
Accommodation Hydebank	—	3	4
DVTA vehicle testing project	—	4	—
Land Registry IT system	—	2	—
Antrim bus station/library	—	2	1
Ulsterbus/Citybus bus replacement	—	—	10
Northern Ireland Railways Class 80 rolling stock replacement	—	—	22
Ulster Folk and Transport museum visitors centre	3	—	—
North West Institute of Further and Higher Education	3	4	—
Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education	—	5	5
St. Genevieve's high school	—	3	4
Drumglass high school	—	3	2
Wellington college	—	3	2
Balmoral high school	—	3	—
Refurbishment/replacement schemes at the Altnagelvin, Downe, Royal and Causeway hospitals	3	9	13
Belfast city hospital renal unit	3	—	—
Belfast city hospital car parking facilities	2	—	—
Miscellaneous equipment leases	1	2	2
Royal Group of Hospitals theatres and intensive care equipment	2	—	—
Other projects not yet confirmed	—	—	12
Total	25	59	91

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18813]

Sir John Wheeler: Since the implementation of a revised rigorous and consistent method of calculating payment performance from 1 June 1996 by HM Treasury, the Northern Ireland Departments and Northern Ireland Office payment performance in percentage terms are:

	Percentage of invoices paid within 30 days or contract payment terms
1 June 1996 to 31 August 1996	94.0
1 September 1996 to 30 November 1996	94.3

The figures for the quarter ending February 1997 are not yet available.

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *408*, if he will make a statement on the possible link between the recent outbreak and spread of Newcastle disease and the normal prohibition of the Newcastle disease vaccination. [17241]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* Vaccination against Newcastle disease has been prohibited in Northern Ireland until recently because of the Province's status as a non-vaccinating area has effectively prohibited the importation of poultry—other than eggs and day-old chicks—from vaccinating countries. That has helped to prevent the introduction of Newcastle disease and other poultry diseases from which Northern Ireland has been free. Vaccination also makes it technically more difficult to detect and diagnose

Newcastle disease if it does occur. Moreover, Newcastle disease occurs even in countries which pursue a policy of vaccination. In such countries it is generally only the breeding flocks and laying flocks which are vaccinated; broiler flocks, which represent the majority of birds in any national flock are normally not vaccinated. The industry relies on maternal immunity to give a degree of protection. In such circumstances, broiler flocks are those most at risk and worldwide experience shows that a disease challenge can override the maternal immunity especially in the final two to three weeks of a broiler's life when the maternal immunity is waning. It is therefore very unlikely that a vaccination policy would have prevented the present outbreaks in broiler flocks which have occurred in Northern Ireland. Where vaccination, especially spray vaccination, is useful, however, is as a means of damping down the spread of Newcastle disease once it appears, and that is the policy which is currently being applied in Northern Ireland.

Scientists

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many scientists were employed by his Department and each of his Department's agencies on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* for each year since 1979 on matters equivalent to those covered by MAFF; and if he will list each agency, service or central laboratory employing scientists on such projects. [18168]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 5 March 1997]:* It is possible to provide only details of the numbers of staff employed in each year since 1990. To provide details for earlier years would involve an expensive and time-consuming exercise to extract the information. I am advising therefore that disproportionate costs apply other than where the information is provided.

	Number
February 1997	446
March 1996	449
March 1995	460
March 1994	483
March 1993	483
March 1992	465
March 1991	476
March 1990	448

The Department employs the staff at two main centres—Veterinary sciences division, Stoney road, Belfast, and the Agricultural and Food science centre, Newforge lane, Belfast.

WALES

Winter Mortality Rates

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what have been the excess weekly mortality rates in Wales for *(a)* December 1996 and *(b)* January 1997 in terms of numbers; and how these compare with the weekly death rates for the same period in each of the previous five years. [17203]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The data for Wales, provided by the Office for National Statistics, on deaths occurring each week—Monday to Sunday—and the annual weekly average are shown in the following tables:

Week beginning	*1996–97*	*1995–96*[1]	*1994–95*[2]	*1993–94*[3]	*1992–93*[4]	*1991–92*[5]
25 November	622	724	607	797	638	671
2 December	639	766	716	750	673	649
9 December	674	777	689	771	670	729
16 December	726	967	715	716	770	749
23 December	879	976	792	840	811	753
30 December	1,107	963	783	789	839	796
6 January	1,061	872	796	786	771	756
13 January	903	780	782	740	737	769
20 January	804	734	785	669	668	742
27 January	739	761	749	714		787

For weeks beginning:

[1] 27 November 1995 to 29 January 1996

[2] 28 November 1994 to 30 January 1995

[3] 29 November 1993 to 31 January 1994

[4] 30 November 1992 to 25 January 1993

[5] 25 November 1991 to 27 January 1992

Data for 1996 and January 1997 are provisional.

Annual weekly average for each calendar year:

1991: 656

1992: 650

1993: 690

1994: 652

1995: 684

1996:[1] 663

[1] Provisional.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the total revenue of local authorities in Wales for the current financial year from *(a)* council tax, domestic rates and community charge and *(b)* non-domestic rates; and what were the equivalent figures for 1994–95 and 1995–96. [18579]

Mr. Hague: Local authorities have budgeted to collect £449 million by way of council tax and will receive £459 million in respect of redistributed non-domestic rates for the current financial year. The equivalent figures for 1994–95 and 1995–96 are £342 million and £381 million for council tax and community charge arrears and £464 million and £520 million for non-domestic rates. The figures for council tax income are gross of council tax benefit grant.

Public Bodies (Freemasonry)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it a requirement for senior executives in non-departmental bodies in Wales to enter membership of masonic organisations in a register available for public inspection; and if he will make a statement. [18578]

Mr. Hague: I have no plans to require the establishment of such registers.

Child Labour (Consultation Exercise)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales to which organisations (i) working in Wales and based in Wales and (ii) working in Wales although based elsewhere he has sent a copy of the document, "Employment of Children: Results of Consultation Exercise"; on what date the document was circulated; and what plans he has to implement the changes necessary to implement the document's proposals. [18724]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The document "Employment of Children: Results of Consultation Exercise" was sent on 13 December 1996 to:

Chief executives and directors of education, local authorities in Wales;

The Secretary, Welsh Local Government Association;

Welsh Group of Education Welfare Officers;

British Medical Association, Wales

Children in Wales;

Health Promotion, Wales

National Farmers' Union, Wales;

National Federation of Women's Institutes, Wales;

National Union of Teachers, Wales;

Royal College of Nursing, Welsh Board;

Sports Council for Wales.

Regulations are being prepared to begin the process of implementing in England, Scotland and Wales changes affecting employment of children below minimum school leaving age, to conform with the European directive on the protection of young people at work.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his Department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18938]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The figures in table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" show estimated capital spending by the private sector under the PFI. The £70 million estimated for 1997–98 includes one contract that has already been signed, for the Osiris information technology project. The remainder of the £70 million is made up of projects for which contracts have not yet been signed. Among these are projects for a new general hospital at Baglan; A55 improvements across Anglesey; Bute Avenue, Cardiff and provision of a new community hospital at Chepstow.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18810]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Economic Secretary, on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *507-8*. Additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Primary Class Sizes

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by local education authority the number of classes in primary schools with *(a)* 31 to 35, *(b)* 36 to 40, *(c)* 41 to 45 and *(d)* 46 or more pupils for each of the last three years for which information is available. [18941]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 6 November 1996, column *514*.

Inward Investment

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the target area for the new Welsh Development Agency inward investment programme extends to cover the St. Asaph business park. [18987]

Mr. Hague: The St. Asaph business park is within the area which has been defined as the eastern A55 corridor.

Homeless Households

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many households have been accepted as homeless by local authorities in rural areas in Wales in each year since 1979; [18671]

(2) how many households have been accepted as homeless by local authorities in Wales in each year since 1979. [18672]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information on the number of households accepted by local authorities as homeless is provided in the following table.

Number of households accepted as homeless

	Rural Wales[1]	*Wales*
1979	874	4,676
1980	883	5,446
1981	821	5,462
1982	786	5,611
1983	794	5,008
1984	833	4,999
1985	1,012	5,371
1986	1,001	5,965
1987[2]	1,311	5,683
1988	1,295	6,818
1989	1,329	7,805
1990[3]	3,387	9,963
1991	1,625	9,843
1992	1,691	10,270
1993[4]	1,821	11,125

Number of households accepted as homeless

	Rural Wales[1]	*Wales*
1994	1,722	10,293
1995	1,658	9,001

Source:
Local authority returns.
Notes:
[1] Aberconwy, Arfon, Brecknock, Carmarthen, Ceredigion, Colwyn, Delyn, Dinefwr, Dwyfor Glyndwr, Meirionnydd, Monmouth, Montgomeryshire, Perseli Pembrokeshire, Radnorshire South Pembrokeshire and Ynys Mon district councils.
[2] The Wales total excludes data for Islwyn from October to December.
[3] Figures include estimates of 2,000 households made homeless in Colwyn as a result of the major flooding incident in February 1990.
[4] Figures include estimates of 237 households made homeless in Aberconwy as a result of the major flooding incident in Llandudno during June 1993.

Health Authority Funding

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his plans with regard to the current resource allocation formula for distributing resources to health authorities in Wales. [19566]

Mr. Hague: I intend to review the formula that is used to distribute resources between health authorities. Its aim will be to test, and, where possible, improve on, the existing approach and to ensure that resources are distributed to health authorities in the most effective and equitable way.

The review will examine the current weighted capitation formula, and, in doing so, will cover a number of issues including the incorporation of new resources of data that may improve our understanding of the relative health need of authorities, whether the current formula adequately reflects the geographical differences between areas, and whether it would be appropriate to take account of new factors.

The review will be led by a resource allocation working group consisting of members of the Welsh Office Health Department, health professional group and health statistics and analysis unit. Health authorities, trusts and GPs will be invited to play a full part in the review through membership of the working group. The group will also seek expert opinions and advice from across the service and other UK health departments as necessary. I expect the working group to report in November this year and to feed its results into the allocation process for 1998–99.

Housing for Wales

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made with the sale of Housing for Wales's loan portfolio. [19567]

Mr. Hague: Contracts were exchanged with NatWest Markets yesterday which establish the terms on which the portfolio will be sold.

I cannot yet provide a final figure for the receipt because the purchase price is subject to changes in the portfolio itself and to movements in the gilt rate between now and completion at the end of March. A receipt exceeding the book value of £58 million was anticipated in spending plans to the current financial year, and will be realised.

The receipt will be subject to subsequent adjustment should any of the loan characteristics differ from those described in the contract in any way that results in a financial loss for either party. This was anticipated in the minute which was laid before Parliament on 10 February. No other warranty apart from the basic undertaking about the ownership of the loans has been given.

ENVIRONMENT

Social Housing (Waltham Forest)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new units of social housing have been provided in the London borough of Waltham Forest in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [18109]

Mr. Clappison: Housing associations are currently the main providers of new social housing. Local authorities' primary housing tasks are to act locally as strategic and enabling bodies and to manage their own stock efficiently.

The publication "Local Housing Statistics" shows estimates of housebuilding completions for each local authority area in England, as reported to the Department. This covers all the London boroughs, including Waltham Forest. It shows completions by sector, including activity by local authorities and housing associations.

"Local Housing Statistics" issue number 103 shows figures for 1986 to 1990; number 105 shows figures for 1991: number 109 covers 1992; number 110 covers 1993; number 117 covers 1994; and number 118 covers 1995. Figures for 1996 as a whole for individual authorities are not yet published.

Copies of this publication are in the Library.

Rock Characterisation Facility, Sellafield

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposed rock characterisation facility near Sellafield on the baseline hydrogeology at the site. [17976]

Mr. Gummer: This is one of the issues which parties to the planning appeal have raised, at the public inquiry and in subsequent correspondence, which I am considering.

Environmental Trusts

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that the environmental trusts have sufficient resources to carry out their work effectively; [18572]

(2) when he expects the environmental trusts to announce their first contributions to environmental projects; [18573]

(3) what steps he is taking to ensure the speedy development of projects arising from the work of the environmental trusts. [18574]

Mr. Clappison: Entrust is the regulatory body—appointed by Customs and Excise—for the environmental bodies scheme. There is an agreed formula to provide it with sufficient funding to carry out its work effectively.

The individual environmental trusts will, of course, be funded via the landfill tax rebate and a contribution from the landfill operator—the rebate is worth up to 90 per cent. of the amount donated subject to a ceiling of 20 per cent. of the companies total tax liability.

Responsibility for the environmental bodies scheme lies with Entrust. As of February 1997, Entrust has sent out 800 application forms and enrolled around 135 bodies. Entrust is aware of approximately £330,000 of donations and a further £1,500,000 of pledges that have been made to date.

Entrust is responsible for promoting the scheme and I understand that it is seeking marketing advice as to how it can best achieve this. Representatives of Entrust have spoken at numerous conferences held to promote the speedy development of projects.

Employers' Insurance Policies

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make a statement on his review of the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969; [18614]

(2) if he will introduce measures to facilitate the tracing of an employer's insurance policy documents and insurer's details when that employer has ceased trading. [18613]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department is currently reviewing the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969, including the problem of identifying the insurers of companies who have ceased to trade. I will announce the outcome of the review in due course.

Hedgerows

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the Government will publish in full the ERM consultants' analysis report of the responses to the draft hedgerow regulations; [19006]

(2) how many responses were received to the Government's consultation paper on the draft hedgerow regulations; and how many responses were in favour of incorporating landscape as one of the criteria for defining an important hedgerow. [19005]

Mr. Clappison: Copies of the full report on the analysis of the responses to the Government's consultation have been placed in the Library of the House, and are available, price £10, from Environmental Resources Management. In addition, the executive summary of the report is available free from my Department and arrangements have been made for individual responses to be placed on deposit in the library of my Department.

Some 465 responses were received by 23 December 1996. A total of 100 comments related to the landscape and amenity value of hedgerows, most of which were in favour of incorporating landscape and amenity importance as explicit criteria in the draft Regulations.

The Government have responded positively to these criticisms by providing a new criterion, which recognises the particular landscape and amenity value of hedgerows that run alongside public rights of way. In addition, landscape importance is an inherent feature in almost all the criteria. For example, historic field patterns are fundamental landscape features, and the diversity of plant species and features—such as trees and hedge banks—that attract a range of wildlife may also give a hedge its significance in the landscape.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many non-metropolitan counties will exist in England when the outcome of the recent review is fully implemented; and by how many the number will have changed since 1 April 1992. [18885]

Sir Paul Beresford: There will be 75 non-metropolitan county areas in England when the recent review is fully implemented, compared to 39 at 1 April 1992. However, only 36 will have county councils. The remaining 39 will be served by unitary councils and 36 of these will be part of historic counties for ceremonial purposes, the exceptions being Bristol, Herefordshire and Rutland.

Energy Efficiency Grants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many house energy efficiency scheme grants were paid in the periods *(a)* 1 April 1995–31 December 1995, *(b)* 1 April 1996–31 December 1996 and *(c)* 1 April 1995–31 March 1996; [18887]

(2) how many home energy efficiency scheme grants he expects to be made during 1996–97; and how many will be paid at the lower rate. [18888]

Mr. Clappison: The numbers of grants paid under the home energy efficiency scheme in the specified periods are as follows:

1 April 1995 to 31 December 1995: 451,063

1 April 1996 to 31 December 1996: 310,992

1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996; 627,383.

During 1996–97, I expect well over 400,000 grants to be paid; some 4,000 are likely to be at the 25 per cent. grant rate. Already, more than 2 million grants worth around £350 million have been paid since this highly regarded scheme began, helping the most vulnerable people to keep warm and use less fuel.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his Department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18925]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Within the Department of Environment's area of responsibility PFI contracts have been signed for:

(a) Docklands light railway Lewisham extension (capital investment of £150 million);

(b) Waltham Forest housing action trust (£15 million); and

(c) Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre (£4 million).

Capital investment in the survey period will be £103 million.

Further capital investment of £123 million is anticipated during the survey years on contracts under negotiation for:

(i) Health and Safety Laboratory (estate rationalisation);

(ii) Countryside Commission (information technology);

(iii) Docklands exhibition centre; and

(iv) DOE (pay and personnel system).

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18804]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *506–7*. Any additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Water Pollution

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* published a report on the prevention of cryptosporidium contamination of drinking water supplies. [18886]

Mr. Clappison: Following a waterborne outbreak of cryptosporidiosis in 1989, my Department jointly with the Department of Health set up an expert group under the late Sir John Badenoch which made a study and published its first report in 1990. The recommended research was put in hand and the group published its final report in 1995. These reports made a number of recommendations on good practice, particularly on monitoring and the operation of treatment works. Both reports were widely circulated to water companies, local authorities and health authorities.

Cancer Studies

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for which cancer-causing organism the Health and Safety Executive in 1994 temporarily banned the research which was being conducted by Birmingham university department of caner studies; and if he will place papers relating to the experimentation in the Library. [18996]

Sir Paul Beresford: The work at Birmingham university involved the expression of oncogenes—genes implicated in the cancer process—in adenovirus vectors and oncogenes in retroviral vectors. Following an HSE inspection, two prohibition notices were issued, which required the university to undertake full risk assessments and also to improve the standard of containment. The university subsequently compiled with these notices.

I will shortly place in the Library papers relating to the above work at the university, which are in HSE's possession.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Health and Safety Executive approved and subsequently monitored the experiments conducted by the Oxford university institute of virology at Wytham Woods in 1994; and if he will make a statement. [18991]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State for the Environment, acting jointly with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, issued a consent on 12 April 1994 to the institute of virology and environmental microbiology to carry out experiments at the university farm, Wytham, Oxfordshire. The consent was issued in accordance with part VI of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992 which require the agreement of the Health and Safety Executive. A copy of the consent was placed on the public register in accordance with the legislation.

The experimental site was inspected by one of Her Majesty's specialist inspectors of biosafety from the Health and Safety Executive in June 1994 and again in September 1995. The inspections covered both human health and safety issues and environmental issues as specified in the consent.

Housing Corporation Loan Portfolio

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *84*, what further progress has been made with the sale of the Housing Corporation's loan portfolio. [19568]

Mr. Curry: Contracts were exchanged with NatWest Markets on Wednesday 5 March, which establish the terms on which the portfolio will be sold.

Because the purchase price is subject to changes in the underlying portfolio and to movements in the gilt rate between now and when completion takes place at the end of March, I cannot yet provide a precise figure for the final receipt. However, at today's rate, a substantial premium over book value will be paid. Some £500 million will be received before the end of this financial year, as anticipated in spending plans, and I confidently expect that the further £500 million anticipated in next year's plans will be exceeded when the balance is received on 1 April.

The receipt will be subject to subsequent adjustment should any of the loan characteristics differ from those described in the contract, in any way that results in a financial loss for either party. This was anticipated in the minute I laid before Parliament on 10 February. No other warranty, apart from the undertaking about the ownership of the loans, has been given.

Three Valleys Water

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to combat the threat to health from water in those parts of London and the south-east supplied by Three Valleys Water; and if he will make a statement. [18782]

Mr. Gummer: Cryptosporidium is a parasite found in man and animals which has been recognised relatively recently as a cause of diarrhoea. It can be transmitted in many ways, including by contact with animals and people,

and by food and water. Cryptosporidiosis, the illness arising from exposure to cryptosporidium, is a self-limiting condition in most adults, but it can last for several weeks. Infants, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems are at greater risk than the general population.

Following a waterborne outbreak in 1989, an expert group was set up under the late Sir John Badenoch and produced a report. The research they recommended was put in hand and the expert group published a further report on the results in 1995. The group made a number of recommendations on good practice, particularly on monitoring and the operation of water treatment. They stressed the importance of co-ordination between water companies, local authorities and health authorities and the formation of outbreak control teams. This has become standard practice. Both reports by the expert group were widely circulated to water companies, local authorities and health authorities. They concluded that properly operated water treatment processes are usually very effective in removing cryptosporidium from water.

The management of the threat to health of consumers affected by this incident is a matter for Three Valleys Water in consultation with the relevant health authorities and local authorities. Boiling the water will kill cryptosporidium. Three Valleys Water has issued precautionary advice to boil water and this advice will remain in force until Three Valleys Water and the relevant health and local authorities are satisfied that the water is safe to drink without boiling.

The drinking water inspectorate has commenced a full investigation to establish whether the recent outbreak of cryptosporidiosis is linked to the water supply. If so, the inspectorate will consider whether a prosecution should be brought against Three Valleys Water for supplying water unfit for human consumption.

Finally, I have agreed with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health that we should convene an expert group under a new chairman to establish what lessons can be learnt from recent incidents involving cryptosporidium.

Homelessness

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many households have been accepted as homeless by local authorities in rural areas in England in each year since 1979; [18694]

(2) how many households have been accepted as homeless by local authorities in England in each year since 1979. [18695]

Mr. Clappison: The data collected from local authorities on households accepted as homeless under the homelessness legislation does not differentiate between households from rural and non-rural areas. Summary prints showing the reported acceptances in each local authority area in England, and the total for England as a whole, for the years 1979 to 1995 are in the Library. The figures for the years 1979 to 1982 are not strictly comparable with those for the later years because of changes to reporting arrangement made in 1980, for non-metropolitan districts, and 1982, for London boroughs and metropolitan districts.

Noise Maps

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to fund the development of noise maps. [18701]

Mr. Gummer: The Government remain to be convinced that national noise mapping would be a cost-effective use of resources.

My Department has, however, recently commissioned research to study local authority practice in noise assessment and mapping, and the costs involved.

Ringway Parliamentary Support Group

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the meetings which Ministers have held in an official capacity with the Ringway parliamentary support group. [18401]

Mr. Gummer: No meetings have been held in the past 12 months with the Ringway parliamentary support group.

HEALTH

Nurses and Doctors

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nurses and *(b)* doctors there were in the NHS in England (i) at the latest available date and (ii) in 1990. [18457]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services medical, nursing and midwifery staff and general medical services general medical practitioners and practice nurses

England 1990 and 1995

	1990	*1995*
HCHS medical staff and GMS general medical practitioners[1] (headcount)	73,720	80,820
HCHS nursing and midwifery staff and GMS practice nurses[2] (whole-time equivalents)	344,260	346,670
Not included in the above:		
HCHS learners[3]	58,840	6,900
Project 2000 students[3]	3,000	33,000

Notes:

[1] Figures exclude hospital practitioners and clinical assistants to avoid double counting.

[2] Excluding agency staff.

[3] Learners are nurses on traditional nurse training courses, and are directly employed by the NHS HCHS. Project 2000 training was introduced in 1989 and has gradually replaced traditional pre-registration nurse training. Project 2000 students are funded by bursaries, they are supernumerary not employees, and are thus excluded from the count of NHS HCHS nursing staff. Figures for Project 2000 students are headcounts and should not be added to other nursing figures in the table which are whole-time equivalents.

HCHS figures are as at 30 September each year.

GMS figures are as at 1 October each year.

Source:

Department of Health's annual medical and dental and non-medical work force censuses and bi-annual general medical services census.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses there were in 1979; and how many there are at the present time. [18939]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is given in the tables.

(a) National Health Service Hospital and Community Health Services doctors and General Medical Services doctors (headcounts),

1979: 61,550

1995: 80,820

All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Table B: NHS Hospital and Community Health Services nursing and midwifery staff and General Medical Services practice nurses England 1979 and 1995

Whole-time equivalents

	1979[1]	*1995*
HCHS nursing and midwifery staff and GMS practice nurses[2]	278,750	346,670
Qualified	192,010	240,160
Unqualified	85,750	92,380
Others	—	4,390
GMS Practice Nurses	990	9,740
Not included in the above:		
HCHS learners[3]	76,650	6,900
Project 2000 students[3]	—	33,000

Notes:

[1] Figures for 1979 do not take account of the reduction in nurses' standard working hours in 1980–81 from 40 to 37.5 hours per week, and are therefore not directly comparable with figures for later years.

[2] Excluding agency staff.

[3] Learners are nurses on traditional nurse training courses, and are directly employed by the NHS HCHS. Project 2000 training was introduced in 1989 and has gradually replaced traditional pre-registration nurse training. Project 2000 students are funded by bursaries, they are supernumerary not employees, and are thus excluded from the count of NHS HCHS nursing staff. Figures for Project 2000 students are headcounts and should not be added to other nursing figures in the table which are whole-time equivalents.

All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:

Department of Health medical and non-medical work force censuses and bi-annual general medical services census.

HCHS figures are as at 30 September each year.

GMS figures are as at 1 October each year.

High-cost Drugs

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been refused prescription of *(a)* growth hormone, *(b)* interferon beta, 1B and *(c)* erythropoietia on the grounds of cost in each of the last two years. [17384]

Mr. Malone: Data are not collected on the number of patients refused particular treatments.

Infant Formula Milk

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what microbiological testing of infant formula baby milk is *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated by Government Departments; and if he will make a statement; [18456]

(2) what responsibility his Department has with regard to microbiological testing of infant formula baby milk; and if he will make a statement. [18454]

Mr. Horam: It is the responsibility of food businesses to ensure that the food they produce is safe, in compliance with all appropriate food safety legislation. Local authority environmental health departments are responsible for enforcing this legislation. The Government, in line with European Union policy, promote microbiological safety through adoption of the hazard analysis critical control point approach.

Sleep Disorders

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities in England make provision for the diagnosis and treatment of sleep disorders; and if he will make a statement. [18417]

Mr. Burns: Sleep disturbance most commonly arises as a result of mental illness such as anxiety and depression. All health authorities will provide a spectrum of treatment ranging from general, primary and care-led, to specialist services.

Behaviourally Disturbed Young People (Prescriptions)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which officials of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the chief medical officer's office attended the meeting arranged in London on 27 January under the auspices of the British Association for Psychopharmacology regarding prescription of medicine for behaviourally disturbed young people; and if he will make a statement. [18488]

Mr. Burns: Officials were not available to attend the meeting, but they will consider reports when available.

Bug Busting Programme

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the *(a)* current and *(b)* future level of funding of the bug busting programme. [18561]

Mr. Horam: The bug busting programme, which is run by the voluntary organisation Community Hygiene Concern, has a three-year project grant of £25,000 a year from the Department of Health under the section 64 general scheme; 1997–98 is the third year. Any application to renew funding will be carefully considered.

NHS Employees' Pay

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS employees currently earn less than £4 an hour. [18734]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally.

Speech and Language Therapy

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of expenditure by each health authority in England for speech and language therapy services for children *(a)* with and *(b)* without a record of needs in each year between 1992 and 1996. [18711]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not centrally available.

NHS Trusts (Chief Executives)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many chief executives and senior managers

of *(a)* NHS trusts and *(b)* health authorities have been dismissed in each of the last three years; and how many have retired before the normal retirement age. [18714]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally.

Ashworth Special Hospital

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations have been made to him concerning the number of patients at Ashworth special hospital who might more suitably be treated elsewhere; what is his estimate of the number; and if he will make a statement concerning all three special hospitals in this respect. [18974]

Mr. Burns: The Reed report of 1994 relating to high secure provision suggests that a number of patients are inappropriately accommodated in high secure settings when their needs could be met in services with lower levels of security.

The Government's response to the concerns raised in the Reed report are set out in a national health service executive document, "High Secure Psychiatric Services: Changes in Funding and Organisation", which was published in June 1995.

The high security psychiatric services commissioning board was set up on 1 April 1996 to oversee these changes to forensic services as part of the Government's response to the Reed report. These changes were designed to establish a clear purchaser-provider structure to allow future service planning to occur in circumstances similar to the rest of the NHS and to foster integration and more regionally focused ownership of future problems and solutions for these services.

The board aims to develop a co-ordinated strategy for commissioning high and long-term medium secure psychiatric services within the NHS and is working, as a matter of priority, to identify the most effective use of available resources to provide high-quality services at the level of security the individual patient requires.

Cryptosporidium

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State of Health what machinery exists for the early identification of risks to public health from the contamination of the water supply; and if the Government will review it in the light of the cryptosporidium outbreak in the Three Valleys Water area. [18912]

Mr. Horam: Since privatisation, water companies are required to report to the drinking water inspectorate all incidents in which water quality might be affected. They are further required to report to health and local authorities any event giving rise to a significant risk to health.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings there have been between his Department, and *(a)* Thames Water, and *(b)* representatives of water companies about the increase in the number of incidents of cryptosporidium in the water supply. [18906]

Mr. Horam: None. The number of incidents of cryptosporidium in the water supply reported to the drinking water inspectorate remains at a low level.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to meet the health authorities in the areas affected by the most recent outbreak of cryptosporidium in the water supply. [18917]

Mr. Horam: Responsibility for investigation and control of such outbreaks lies with local public health specialists. Officials from the Department have been in close contact with these specialists since the problem came to light and are available to attend meetings of the incident management team should this be considered necessary.

Paracetamol and Methionine Compound

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons the paracetamol and methionine compound was blacklisted for prescription on the NHS in 1986; what is his Department's current policy on the compound; and if he will make a statement. [18372]

Mr. Malone: The decision to add Pameton, which contains paracetamol and methionine, to the list of medicines which general practitioners may not prescribe at national health service expense was taken following advice from the advisory committee on the NHS drugs. The committee took into account that Pameton was considerably more expensive than paracetamol, that a doctor who was concerned about the effects of paracetamol on a patient could prescribe an alternative instead, that allowing the product to be prescribed would have no effect in potential suicide cases where paracetamol tablets were bought over the counter, and that, while the value of methionine after paracetamol overdose was well documented, evidence of benefit from methionine when administered at the same time as paracetamol was limited. The committee continues to keep the matter under review and will advise the Department of any recommended changes on the prescribing of such products.

Drug Overdoses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many overdoses from non-prescription drugs were recorded in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [18374]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not held centrally.

Swine Fever

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effects on humans of the consumption of pork and ham infected with swine fever. [18427]

Mr. Horam: There is no evidence that this disease has ever affected humans.

Connective Tissue Disease

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the United Kingdom suffer from connective tissue disease *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the population. [18826]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Prostheses

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what clinical trials are *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on human prostheses, prior to their being made available through the national health service. [18827]

Mr. Horam: Under the medical devices regulations which came into force on 1 January 1995, manufacturers who wish to run clinical trials on medical devices must submit their protocol to the Medical Devices Agency for assessment prior to the commencement of the trial.

Since that date, there have been 20 applications for trials on human prostheses. As part of the marketing approval system under the regulations, designated independent certification organisations may assess the results of such trials as part of the conformity process prior to the product being placed on the market and being available for use in the national health service or more generally.

Alpha-1-Antitrypsin Deficiency Disease

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated concerning Alpha-1-Antitrypsin deficiency disease; and if he will make a statement on the incidence of the disease. [18821]

Mr. Horam: None. Information on the incidence of the disease is not collected centrally.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which hospitals in Essex have reported cases of MRSA in the past 12 months; how many cases there were in each hospital; and in how many cases MRSA contributed to or caused death; [18990]

(2) how many hospitals have reported cases of MRSA in England in the past 12 months; how many cases there were in total; and in how many cases MRSA was the cause of or contributed to death. [18995]

Mr. Horam: Information on the total number of cases of infection or colonisation with methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus is not collected centrally. Some health authorities monitor the occurrence of MRSA, but these are likely to be subject to local variations in the type of data collected and the methods of collection used.

Data on the occurrence of MRSA, compiled by the public health laboratory service, are derived from isolates submitted voluntarily by hospitals in England and Wales for typing. These show that 177 hospitals in England reported incidents of MRSA affecting a total of 19,385 patients in 1996. Similarly, data held by the PHLS for 1996 show that three hospitals in Essex reported incidents of MRSA affecting 88, 59 and 15 patients respectively. An incident is defined as three or more patients with the same strain of MRSA in a month from the same hospital. It is not know in how many cases MRSA contributed to or caused death.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in making available the MRSA combating drug developed by the team headed by Professor Brian Austin at Heriot-Watt university; and if he will make a statement. [18994]

Mr. Horam: We understand that Professor Austen's work is at a very early stage.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital screen patients for MRSA on admission. [18988]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being taken to prevent the spread of MRSA outside hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [18993]

Mr. Horam: In May 1996, the Department issued a leaflet on methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus to health authorities, social services departments and nursing and residential homes, and guidelines on the control of infection generally in residential and nursing homes. These guidelines advise that MRSA rarely presents a danger to people in these settings and that basic measures to prevent the spread of any type of infection, should prevent the spread of MRSA. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much public money is being directed to researching into the cause, extent of, possible cures for, measures to combat and drugs for MRSA; and if he will make a statement. [18989]

Mr. Horam: Information in the form requested is not held centrally. For information on the Department's expenditure on research into MRSA and developing new antibiotics, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) on 22 January, *Official Report*, columns *15-16*.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his Department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18933]

Mr. Horam: The figures in table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" represent an estimate of expected spend on private finance schemes. All private finance schemes being prepared within the national health service were taken into account when these figures were estimated.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18822]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds, (Mr. Spring) by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *506–7*.

Capital Projects (Greater London)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much was the income spent in Greater London on capital projects in the NHS in each of the last five years; and what is the projected spending in each of the next five years; [13703]

(2) if he will list the capital projects costing over £100,000 which are planned to start in Greater London in the five years from 30 September 1996, indicating the number and sums allocated in each year. [13702]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* With regard to past expenditure on capital schemes, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on 22 January, *Official Report*, columns 664–65. Only information relating to capital schemes costing over £1 million, for which national health service executive approval is required, is available. Details of planned schemes in this category, starting in Greater London after 30 September 1996, for which outline or full business case approval has been granted by the NHS executive, are given in the table. Schemes costing below £1 million are a matter for individual NHS trusts.

Capital schemes in Greater London costing over £1 million with outline or full business case approval, and a planned start date after 30 September 1996

Scheme	*1996–97 £000*	*1997–98 £000*	*1998–99 £000*	*1999–00 £000*	*2000–01 £000*
Camden and Islington Community Health Services Rationalisation of mental health services[1]	—	4,650	4,650	4,650	4,650
Barnet Healthcare Trust Edgware Community Hospital[1]	—	6,250	6,250	6,250	6,250
BHB Community Healthcare Acute psychiatric[1]	4,800	4,000	2,967	—	—
Central Middlesex Hospital Care centre/ACAD	—	9,500	9,500	—	—
Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare HISS—information system	—	3,380	—	—	—
Enfield Community Care ESMI[1]	—	1,380	1,380	—	—
Hammersmith Hospitals Queen Charlottes[1]	—	5,000	4,500	—	—
Harefield Hospital Theatres[1]	—	3,000	—	—	—
Hillingdon Hospital Mental health services[1]	—	3,000	4,500	—	—
North-west London Mental Health Highcare Home and Safe Haven	1,135	1,144	—	—	—
Parkside Health NHS Trust Wembley Health Centre	500	4,500	457	—	—
Royal Hospitals NHS Trust Acute rationalisation[1]	—	8,350	39,000	49,000	49,000
Royal London Homeopathic Hospital Relocation[1]	41	2,085	2,085	—	—
UCL Hospitals NHS Trust Redevelopment[1]	—	6,153	31,000	31,000	12,147
Wellhouse Edgware/Barnet General phase 1b[1]	—	7,000	7,000	7,000	7,000
West London Healthcare Boiler house[1]	—	2,500	2,500	—	—
Lambeth Healthcare NHS Trust IPAMU[1]	—	1,263	1,084	—	—
Lambeth Healthcare NHS Trust Brixton ICC[1]	—	1,598	1,598	—	—
Merton and Sutton Community NHS Trust Queen Mary's Carshalton[1]	1,500	—	—	—	—
Optimum NHS Trust Honor Oak Health Centre[1]	—	1,000	916	—	—
Oxleas NHS Trust Bexley Hospital[1]	1,000	5,000	5,000	2,900	—
Queen Mary's Sidcup accident and emergency extension[1]	2,000	1,200	—	—	—
Lambeth Healthcare NHS Trust Manor Health Centre[1]	500	—	—	—	—
Guy's and St. Thomas' stage 1 cardiac	[2]12,250	2,750	—	—	—
Guy's and St. Thomas' stage 1 UMDS	1,000	—	—	—	—
King's Healthcare Phase 1 cardiac	1,542	—	—	—	—
St. George's Healthcare Day surgery	—	2,770	—	—	—
St. George's Healthcare Elderly	—	2,500	—	—	—
Greenwich Health Care Woolwich Arsenal Resource Centre[1]	—	1,000	2,000	—	—
Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust Queen Elizabeth Hospital[1]	—	6,000	10,000	10,000	2,000
Guy's and St. Thomas' Major redevelopment[1]	—	4,000	20,000	20,000	6,000
St. George's Cardiac/Neurosciences[1]	—	5,000	15,000	15,000	5,000
Croydon Community Centre for rehabilitation services	—	512	1,000	—	—
St. Helier Hospital NHS Trust Nelson site[1]	[2]2,083	4,500	—	—	—

[1] Schemes which have received outline business case approval only. There is not yet any commitment to fund such schemes from public capital. Figures given for costs in each year are estimates only and are subject to change.
[2] Cost includes enabling work carried out in 1995–96.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Hill Farmers

14. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on financial support for hill farmers since 1992. [17559]

Mr. Boswell: Expressed in real terms at 1992 prices, total direct livestock subsides to the less favoured areas, including hill livestock compensatory allowances, have gone up from £460 million in 1992 to an estimated £575 million this year, an increase of 25 per cent. This confirms the Government's on-going commitment to help farmers in the hills and uplands.

Fish Breeding Areas

15. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy towards the creation of non-fishing areas of sea where fish can breed. [17560]

Mr. Baldry: Off our coast, there are already a number of no-fishing areas to protect spawning herring. The Government are always ready to consider proposals for further such areas.

Food Imports

16. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of United Kingdom food imports are of products also grown within the United Kingdom; and what action he has taken to increase the proportion of home-produced food consumed. [17561]

Mrs. Browning: Provisional figures for 1995 show that 57 per cent. of our food imports were classified as indigenous food products or materials. Our farmers and growers already produce world-class products and we are working with the industry to help develop a similar level of excellence in marketing.

Fish Quotas

17. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on North sea fish quotas. [17562]

Mr. Baldry: The North sea fish quotas agreed for 1997 represent the best possible deal for British fishermen consistent with scientific advice and the conservation of stocks for the future.

Small Food Producers (European Directives)

18. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ensure that the supply of food and produce from small-scale producers, with special reference to garden, allotment and small market garden growers, is not eliminated as a result of European directives. [17563]

Mr. Boswell: Yes. This is already Government policy, but I am not aware of any moves by the European Union which would affect gardeners, allotment holders and market gardeners.

Battery Hens

19. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to improve the welfare of egg-laying hens kept in battery cages. [17654]

Mrs. Browning: We have pressed the European Commission to complete the overdue review of the EU directive. The scientific veterinary committee's updated report was published in October last year. The Commission has said that its proposals for revised Community standards will soon follow.

Arable Area Payments Scheme

20. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total amount of funds distributed under the arable area payments scheme in 1996. [17565]

Mr. Baldry: Total payments under the arable area payments scheme by MAFF in the 1996–97 financial year are forecast at just over £1.1 billion.

British Food

21. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent initiatives his Department has taken to promote British food. [17566]

Mrs. Browning: At the recent international food and drink exhibition held at Earls court, the Department co-sponsored the British speciality food section with Food From Britain to help raise the profile of this important sector of the food and drink industry. This initiative received universal praise from exhibitors and buyers, and the exhibition received a record number of trade visits.

Hedgerows

22. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to encourage farmers to preserve hedges and hedgerows. [17567]

Mr. Boswell: Regulations to protect important hedgerows were laid before Parliament on 3 March 1997.

Enhanced incentives for the restoration and planting of hedges, which form an important part of the countryside stewardship scheme, were announced on 17 February. Grants are also available under the environmentally sensitive areas scheme, and the Department funds ADAS and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group to provide free initial conservation advice. Farmers are also required not to damage, destroy or remove hedges on or adjacent to set-aside land.

Chocolate Manufacturers

23. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to protect the interests of United Kingdom chocolate manufacturers; and if he will make a statement. [17568]

Mrs. Browning: When negotiations begin on the proposal to amend the 1973 EC chocolate directive, the Government will seek to protect the right of British consumers to continue to choose established British products under their traditional names.

In the meantime, we have ensured that other member states are fully aware of the UK position on the proposal and have drawn the attention of hon. Members and Members of the European Parliament to the important issues for United Kingdom chocolate manufacturers in the proposed amendments to the chocolate directive.

Milk Marque

14. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the functioning of the milk market since the establishment of Milk Marque. [17569]

Mr. Baldry: I am very pleased with the results of the Government's deregulation of the milk market. In its recent report on the UK dairy industry and the common agricultural policy regime, the Agriculture Committee concluded that deregulation has been highly successful.

British Beef Ban

25. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on recent discussions at the Council of Ministers on the lifting of the ban on British beef sales. [17570]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The procedures envisaged for lifting the export ban involve the Standing Veterinary Committee and other advisory Commission committees, not the Council Nevertheless, I have kept the Council informed on the UK's progress in fulfilling the preconditions laid down under the Florence agreement. Now that we have fulfilled all the preconditions and I have sent Commissioners Fischler and Bonino our proposals for a UK export certified herds scheme, I will be telling the next Agriculture Council what we have achievedandpressingforearlyprogress.

Fish Conservation

26. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from non-sector fisherman regarding sea fish conservation. [17571]

Mr. Baldry: I am in frequent contact with non-sector fishermen about sea fish conservation and related issues. Most recently, I met non-sector fishermen from Kent and Essex, accompanied by my hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point and for Basildon (Mr. Amess), on 27 January to discuss a range of issues including the closure of the North sea sole fishery to vessels of 10 m and under until 21 April.

Set-aside

27. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what actions are being taken by his Department to ensure preservation of natural habitats in set-aside land. [17572]

Mr. Boswell: The UK's management rules for set-aside were drawn up in consultation with farming and environmental organisations and are designed to protect wildlife and the environment while allowing farmers to carry out their normal agricultural operations. For example, environmental features such as hedgerows, streams and ponds on or adjacent to set-aside land may not be damaged, destroyed or removed. The rules are regularly reviewed and from 1997 have been further modified to help protect groundnesting birds.

BSE

28. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many confirmed cases of BSE have been recorded so far this year; and if he will make a statement on trends in the number of cases. [17573]

Mr. Baldry: As at 21 February 1997, of the 891 cases placed under restriction in Great Britain in 1997, 72 had been confirmed. Throughout the epidemic there has been a delay between slaughter and eventual confirmation due to the requirement to permit fixation of brain tissue prior to its examination. The BSE epidemic has continued to decline markedly during the last year and is now at its lowest level for eight years.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the methods of disposal that are *(a)* permitted and *(b)* currently in operation for (i) specified bovine material and (ii) non-specified bovine material from cattle with bovine spongiform encephalopathy, including the condensate and washwater produced from rendering of such material. [18696]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The carcases of virtually all BSE-suspect animals are incinerated: in 1996, 9,643 carcases were incinerated and three buried. No material from BSE suspects is allowed to go for rendering.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the number of carcases of cattle with bovine spongiform encephalopathy that was buried in each site for each year from 1986. [18697]

Mr. Hogg: It is not possible to provide details of the number of BSE-suspect carcases disposed of at specific landfill site, as a complete set of records is not held centrally. A complete record could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It is however known that the total number of BSE-suspect cases disposed of by landfill is approximately 6,120. This figure represents approximately 3 per cent. of the total number of BSE suspects slaughtered.

Animal Welfare

29. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has already taken to improve animal welfare; what further steps he is considering; and if he will make a statement. [17574]

Mrs. Browning: My right hon. and learned Friend has secured agreement in the Council of Ministers to measures which will result in a significant improvement in the welfare of calves. The use of the close confinement veal crate, already banned in the UK, will be phased out across Europe by 2006. Other changes, including a ban on unacceptable diets, will come into effect from 1 January next year. We have also been preparing national implementing measures which will give effect to improved EU rules on welfare in transit. We will work hard to ensure that other member states implement and enforce these rules too.

We will continue to press for improved measures to protect the welfare of laying hens and, at the intergovernmental conference, for the adoption of a protocol endorsing the Community's role in the protection of animal welfare.

Infant Formula Milk

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what responsibility his Department has with regard to microbiological testing of infant formula baby milk; and if he will make a statement. [18455]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by the Under-Secretary of State for Health.

Quarantine

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Minster of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will announce the result of his review of the quarantine regulations. [18675]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Members for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) and Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 27 February 1997, *Official Report*, column *326*.

Swine Fever

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what steps he is taking to monitor the spread of swine fever in Germany; [18429]

(2) when he plans to meet his EU counterparts to discuss the export of live pigs or pig carcases infected with swine fever; [18430]

(3) when he plans to meet his EU counterparts to discuss the sale of German pork and ham infected with swine fever. [18428]

Mrs. Browning: I have no plans to meet my EU counterparts on this topic, which is being kept under continuous review by the EC Standing Veterinary Committee. Community legislation lays down the internal control measures against swine fever which the German veterinary authorities must apply, and additional controls specifically applicable to the export of live pigs and fresh and processed pigmeat products from Germany. These measures have been implemented to prevent the spread of disease within Germany and to other countries. They include restrictions on the movement of live animals and products within Germany, a total ban on the export of live animals and pigmeat products from infected regions and additional safeguards applicable to exports from other regions.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his Department is responsible as identified in Table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18923]

Mr. Boswell: The financial provision in the Ministry's entry for 1999–00 in Table 5.5 of the Red Book is an outline for non-PFI procurement only which will be subject to revision when PFI tenders have been received.

It relates to two projects:

(a) Whitehall HQ Building (Accommodation).

(b) Sea-Going Research Vessel Services.

Abbotsland Farm

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if Abbotsland farm, Capel le Ferne, is operating as a staging point, as defined under EU law; and if he will make a statement. [18999]

Mrs. Browning: No. Defined criteria for staging points under directive 91/628, as amended, have yet to be agreed by the Council of Agriculture Ministers.

ADAS

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the advantages of the privatisation of ADAS. [17553]

Mr. Boswell: The privatisation of ADAS will realise some £23.5 million for the taxpayer. ADAS's work for MAFF and the Welsh office is now on a sound contractual basis and future liabilities on Government have been minimised. ADAS will be free to develop its business in response to customer demand.

Running Costs

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, columns 398–400, on administration costs, if he will provide a breakdown of the additional running costs provision for the Agriculture Departments. [17956]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* Details on the additional administration provisions for the Agriculture Departments to fund BSE measures are below. The figures for MAFF include amounts for enforcement costs specified bovine material controls and research and development.

£ million

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*
Intervention board	16.5	13.4	13.1	12.9
MAFF	52.2	55.3	54.4	54.1
Scottish Office	2	2	2	2
Total	70.7	70.7	69.5	69

Flock Mark

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his Answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *658*, if he will set out the method whereby a flock mark to all registered holdings ensured that each holding was individually identifiable. [18998]

Mrs. Browning: Each flock has been allocated an individual alpha-numeric mark.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18817]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the Hon. Member to the answer given by the Economic Secretary on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *506–507*. Any additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 291**

SESSION 1996–97

24th February—6th March 1997

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates and Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

A13
Bridges 53w

A30
Armed forces 639w

A628
418w

Abbey Wood
589w

Abbott, Ms Diane
Questions
Homicide, Prison sentences 697–8w
Homicide, Sentencing 698w
Police custody, Death 437w
Young offenders, Prison sentences 695–6w

Abortion (Amendment) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 595

Absent voting
Election offences 3w, 129–30w

Access to the Countryside Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 594

Accident and emergency departments
Crimes of violence 71w
Greater London 520w
Private hospitals 657w

Accounting
National income 489–90w

Action for community employment
Northern Ireland 333w, 411–3, 659–60w

Acute beds
656w

Adams, Mrs Irene
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 756

Administration of justice
624
Ministerial statements (27.02.97) 429–42
Young offenders 464w

Administration Select Committee
(24.02.97) 122

Admissibility of evidence
Telephone tapping 603–4w

Adoptive Mothers (Maternity Leave) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 595
Public petitions (28.02.97) 525

Advertising
Child Support Agency 83w
London Underground 548w
Privatisation 236–7w

Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(26.02.97) 396

Advisory Board on Family Law
see Family Law Advisory Board

Aerospace industry
Wales 448w

African National Congress
Bombings 128–9w

Age
Dept of Health 67w
Dept of Social Security 280–1w
Dept of Trade and Industry 479w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 55w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 77–8w

Age—continued
Ministry of Defence 488w
Scottish Office 521w
Treasury 134–5w
Welsh Office 274w

Agricultural and Food Research Council
Scientists 482w

Agricultural chemicals
681–2w
Taxation 674–5w

Agricultural Development and Advisory Service
Privatisation 748w

Agricultural policy
512w

Agricultural production
Overseas aid 542–3w

Agricultural research
324–6w, 674–80w
Central Science Laboratory 652–3w
Northern Ireland Office 661–4w, 723–4w
Office of Science and Technology 620–1w
Scottish Office 652–3w, 690–1w
Welsh Office 672–4w

Agricultural subsidies
Hill farming 741–2w

Aid financed trade
467–8w

Aids for handicapped
Courts 287w

Ainger, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 52, 55
Welsh Development Agency Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.97) 799–800, 805
Questions
Blood transfusion services, Wales 91w
Civil servants, Career structure 1–2
District health authorities, Administrative costs 94w
Employment 238w
GP fundholders 74w
GP fundholders, Wales 93–4w
Health service staff, Lost working days 73w
Intimidation, Industrial health and safety 177w
Intimidation, Lost working days 176–7w
Mines, Defence procurement 120w
MV Sea Empress, Oil pollution 49–50w
MV Sea Empress, Salvage 50w
Nurses 183w
Police informers 133w
Railway safety, Fences 551–2w, 716–7w
Social fund 563w
Stress related illnesses, Lost working days, 8w
Teachers, Lost working days 29–30w

Ainsworth, Mr Robert
Questions
Councillors, Legal costs 219w
Fishing 611–2
Older workers 559w

Air accidents
Military aircraft 114–5w, 404w, 485w, 589w

Air force
Armed forces training 486w

Air pollution
151–2w, 596w
Coke 152w
Nitrogen oxides 600w
Tipping of waste 460w

Air pollution control
Church Commissioners 65–6w
Fees and charges 634–5w

Air routes
Scotland 43–4w

Air safety
(26.02.97) 297–302, 609–10w
Military aircraft 487w

Air traffic control
586–7w
North Sea 545w
Scotland 141w, 549w

Airbuses
Government assistance to industry 619–20w

Aircrew
Malaria 180w
Military aircraft 254w
Nimrod aircraft 114w
Sea Harrier aircraft 254w

Airlines
Nature conservation 533–5w

Airport tax
Northern Ireland 329w, 535w
Scottish islands 535w
Tax yields 535w

Airports and Aerodromes (Noise) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 594

Albania
56w, 223w
Armed forces 105w
Official gifts 156w, 314w
Overseas aid 702w
Overseas trade 63w

Alcoholic drinks
(28.02.97) 552–74
Young people 537w

Alexander, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1033
Questions
Beef, Exports 1010–1
Temporary employment 332

Alison, Rt Hon Michael, Second Church Estates Commissioner
Questions
Bishops 65–6w
Church buildings, Cultural heritage 64w
Church Commissioners, Air pollution control 65–6w
Church Commissioners, Finance 18–20
Clergy, Labour costs 66w
Clergy, Pensions 65w
Religious education 330

Allason, Mr Rupert
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 919–20, 925, 946, 952–4
Questions
Public contracts, VAT 472w
Standard spending assessments 705
Water charges, Profits taxes 148

Allcock, Michael
Prosecutions 405w

Allen, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Drug abuse resistance education programme, Nottinghamshire (26.02.97) 397–404, 407–10

Allen, Mr Graham*—*continued
Questions
Dental charges 568w
Dental services, Laboratories 566–8w
Drug abuse resistance education programme 705w
Drug abuse resistance education programme, Nottinghamshire 705w
Health education, Drug abuse 705–6w

Alternative dispute resolution
623

Alton, Mr David
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 446–7
Questions
Northern Ireland government 413

Ambulance services
442w

Amess, Mr David
Questions
British Railways Board, External financing limits 715w
Wallenberg, Raoul 146
Youth unemployment, School leaving 261w

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Action for community employment, Northern Ireland 333w, 411–3, 659–60w
Airport tax, Northern Ireland 329w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Northern Ireland 93–5w
Central Veterinary Laboratory, Scientists 662–3w
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Northern Ireland 336w, 511w
Educational finance, Northern Ireland 417–8, 509–11w
Election offences, Northern Ireland 99w
Electoral register, Northern Ireland 330w, 334–6w
Electorate, Northern Ireland 95–6w, 245w
Electricity interconnectors, Northern Ireland 331w
Ethnic groups, Northern Ireland 100w
Farm and countryside enhancement scheme, Northern Ireland 95w
Fowl pest, Northern Ireland 101w, 659w, 722–3w
Gaelic language, Northern Ireland 101w
Gaelic language, Schools 100w
Hard core unemployed, Northern Ireland 329–30w
Institute of Food Research, Scientists 662w
Integrated schools, Newtownards 95w
Local authority powers, Northern Ireland 332–3w
Millennium, Northern Ireland 330w
Northern Ireland Dept of Economic Development, Efficiency scrutinies 399w
Northern Ireland Forum 420
Northern Ireland government 418–20
Northern Ireland Office, Agricultural research 661–4w, 723–4w
Northern Ireland Office, Religious discrimination 511–2w
Northern Ireland Office, Veterinary services 662w
School population, Newtownards 95w
Slaughterhouses, Inspections 660–1w
Teachers, Northern Ireland 336w
University of Ulster 100w
Youth unemployment, Northern Ireland 422–3

Anderson, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 440
Wales (27.02.97) 457–8, 462, 483, 508–13, 515, 522

Anderson, Ms Janet
Debates etc.
Business questions (06.03.97) 1041

Animal diseases
Compensation 78w, 682–4w

Animal experiments
Primates (25.02.97) 165
Scotland 687–8w

Animal feed
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 80w, 1011
Deregulation initiative 6–7
EC action 321w
Food labelling 80w

Animal quarantine
Codes of practice 194w, 326–7w, 747w

Animal welfare
746w
Battery hens 743w

Animals
Identification 1016–7

Antibiotics
Prescriptions 72w, 92w
Wales 92w

Antidumping duties
472–8w
Office equipment 472w

Antismoking campaign
EC action 565–6w

Apache AH-64 helicopter
108w

Apprentices
338–68w

Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(05.03.97) 961–95

Arable area payments scheme
743–4w

Arbuthnot, Mr James, Minister of State for Defence
Debates etc.
European Armaments Agency (05.03.97) 870–4
Questions
Abbey Wood 589w
Battlefield artillery target engagement system 488–9w
Contracts for services, Ministry of Defence 256–7w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Privatisation 712w
Defence land, Radioactive wastes 590w
Dera Radiation Protection Services 400–2w
Devonport Dockyard, Hazardous materials 586w
Employment agencies, Ministry of Defence 105–6w
Firing ranges, Eskmeals 251w
Government buildings, Riyadh 404w
Mines, Defence procurement 120w
Mines, Treaties 120w
Navy 105w
Nuclear submarines, Decommissioning 188w
Nuclear submarines, Radioactive waste disposal 255–6w

Arbuthnot, Mr James*—*continued
Private finance initiative, Ministry of Defence 710–1w
Rangeless airborne instrumented debriefing system 115w
Rosyth Dockyard, Hazardous materials 257w, 586w
Theft, Ministry of Defence 371–8w
Weapons, Testing 370–1w

Armed forces
A30 639w
Albania 105w
EC law 588–9w
Germany 590w

Armed forces cadets
Armed forces training 636–7w
Finance 254–5w

Armed forces casualties
591–2w

Armed forces catering services
Beef 1017

Armed forces civilians
486w

Armed forces deployment
Army 709w
Peace keeping operations 617–8w

Armed forces education allowances
637w
Boarding schools 369w
Quantock School 117w

Armed forces housing
Building repairs 257–8w
House purchase 404w
Rents 369–70w, 403w

Armed forces medical services
424–5
Hospitals 385–6w

Armed forces officers
RAF Menwith Hill 119w

Armed forces recruitment
Yorkshire and Humberside 106w

Armed forces training
108w, 112w, 116w
Air force 486w
Armed forces cadets 636–7w
Dumfries and Galloway 109w
Electronic warfare 114w
Firing ranges 111w
Goose Bay 112w, 637–8w
Harrogate 638w
Helicopters 111w, 116w
Kielder forest 115w
RAF Spadeadam 113–4w, 116w
Rwanda 587–8w
Stranraer 112–3w

Arms control
Chemical weapons 488w

Arms control negotiations
Mines 11–2

Arms to Iraq Inquiry
18

Arms trade
478–9w

Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Questions
Firing ranges, Schools 122w, 487w
Local government expenditure 694

Army
Armed forces deployment 709w
Museums and galleries 106–7w
Public relations 487w

Army in Northern Ireland
Prisoners 331w, 403–4w

Army reserves
427

Army strength
638w

Arnold, Mr Jacques
Debates etc.
Business questions (06.03.97) 1044
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1070, 1076
Questions
Beef, Exports 1012–3
Labour Party, Taxation 1020
Latin America 57w
Latin America, Overseas aid 13
Open government 8
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits uprating 134

Arrests
130w

Art works
Inheritance tax 306w

Arts finance
Wales 616

Arts sponsorship
616

Arts Therapists Board
(26.02.97) 396

Asbestosis
Railway workers 51–2w

Ashby, Mr David
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 437
NHS (24.02.97) 24, 26

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Questions
Conservative Party 708
Gulf war syndrome 425–6

Ashworth Hospital Inquiry 1997
70–1w

Assisted places scheme
29w, 261w, 321–2
Cheshire 555–6w
Lancashire 555w
Scotland 654–6w

Astra Holdings
Pension funds 30–1w

Atkins, Rt Hon Robert,
Questions
Standard spending assessments 702

Atkinson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance) Bill, Rep adjourned (28.02.97) 592
Questions
Agricultural policy 512w
Bournemouth, Dept for Education and Employment 148–9w
Computers, Millennium 60w
Fibromyalgia 566w
Grant maintained schools, Bournemouth 327

Atkinson, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 553, 558–60, 563
Questions
Administration of justice 624
Agricultural Development and Advisory Service, Privatisation 748w

Atkinson, Mr Peter—continued
English Heritage, Church buildings 499w
Fishing 612

Attorney General
Billing 708–9w
Environmental audit 21–2w
Hazardous materials 22w
Parliamentary questions 235w
Theft 235–6w

Austin-Walker, Mr John
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 451–2
Libyan Arab Republic, Sanctions (28.02.97) 601–2
Road Traffic Reduction Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 582–3
Questions
Belmarsh Prison, Prisoners' release 700w
Gastroschisis 74w, 238–9w
Gastroschisis, Wales 672w
Housing benefits, Government grants to local authorities 528–9w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 430–2w

Availability for work
Jobseeker's allowance 258w

Average earnings
496w

Avon ring road
462w, (06.03.97) 1126–32

Axle weights
Lorries 50w, 611–2w, 715–6w

Babies
Prisons 438w

Baby milks
735–6w, 746w

Balblair
Tree felling 647w

Baldry, Mr Tony, Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Questions
Arable area payments scheme 743–4w
Beef, Intervention stocks 683w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 78–9w, 674w, 745w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Compensation 195w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 193–4w, 398–9w, 683–4w, 1005–6
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 79w, 190–3w
Common agricultural policy, Devon 399w
Common fisheries policy 1011–2
Fish conservation 743w, 745w
Fisheries 1015–6
Fisheries, North East region 323w
Fishing quotas 1006, 1012, 1015
Fishing quotas, North Sea 743w
Lobsters, Fish conservation 1006–7
Milk, Marketing 744w
Salmon, Republic of Ireland 321w
White fish, Fish conservation 571w

Bank of England
423–4

Bankruptcy
703–4w

Banks, Mr Matthew
Questions
Public Works Loan Board, Local authorities 617w
Scottish Grand Committee 643w
Tax Law Rewrite Steering Committee 308w

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 450, (06.03.97) 1044
Great Apes (Prohibition of Experiments) Bill, 1R (25.02.97) 165
Intervention during questions after statement (06.03.97) 1029, 1032
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 156
National Heritage Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 209–11
Oral question time intervention (03.03.97) 617
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1031
Questions
A30, Armed forces 639w
Airlines, Nature conservation 533–5w
Animal quarantine, Codes of practice 326w
Birds, Pest control 298w, 572w
Church Commissioners, Finance 20
Habitual residence test 396–8w
National Lottery 501w, 616–7
Open government 8
Organic food 1008
Rabies 539w, 569w
Rabies, Europe 573w
Salmon, Scotland 524w, 581–2w
Standard spending assessments, Rural areas 703–4

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 449, (06.03.97) 1043
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1031
Questions
Electorate, Northern Ireland 245w
Electorate, Scotland 231w
Members' correspondence 272w
National Lottery 498–9w
Northern Ireland Forum 420
Personal pensions, Marketing 307w
Post codes, Scottish Office 389–90w
Temporary employment 331–2

Barnet Borough Council
Direct labour departments 602w

Barron, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 50, 54
Questions
NHS trusts, Private finance initiative 569w

Bates, Mr Michael, Paymaster-General
Questions
Billing, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 691w
Economic and monetary union, Departmental coordination 8–9
Economic policy, Departmental coordination 3
Employment agencies, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 165–6w
Former ministers, Redundancy pay 11
Local authority powers 9
Ministerial Committee on Coordination and Presentaion of Government Policy 2–3
Next steps initiative 123w
Open government 8
Theft, Cabinet Office 166w

Battery hens
Animal welfare 743w

Battle, Mr John
Questions
Energy prices, EC countries 168–70w
Pre-school education, Leeds 626w
Science education, GCE A Level 630w

Battlefield artillery target engagement system
488–9w

Bayley, Mr Hugh
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 451
Questions
Armed forces recruitment, Yorkshire and Humberside 106w
Army, Museums and galleries 106–7w
Army strength 638w
British Rail, Redundancy 50–1w
Employment opportunities 260w
Hospital admissions 69w
Hospital consultants, Private patients 69w
Hospital consultants, Vacancies 267w
NHS Executive, Finance 69–70w
Offensive weapons 604–5w
Patients' transport 383w
Pay beds 68–9w
Railway transport, Privatisation 51w, 501w
Railway workers, Asbestosis 51–2w
UN Conference on Environment and Development 595w

BBC
Broadcasting controls 32–3w
Digital television 499w

Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Questions
EC external trade 248–50w
UK trade with EC 246–8w

Beef
Armed forces catering services 1017
Exports 745w, 1010–6
Imports 76w
Intervention stocks 683w
Northern Ireland 329w

Beer
Refreshment Dept 540w

Beggs, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Hospitals, Northern Ireland (05.03.97) 817–20
Questions
Action for community employment, Northern Ireland 333w
Beef, Intervention stocks 683w
Educational finance, Northern Ireland 417–8
Housing and handicapped 698
Housing construction, Carrickfergus 243w, 335–6w
Job security 320–1

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Questions
Hazardous materials, House of Commons Commission 20w

Belfast
Public sector housing 184w

Bell, Mr Stuart
Debates etc.
Company Accounts (Disclosure of Directors Emoluments) Regulations (03.03.97) 668–74, 676

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Vincent, Reg, Pensions (26.02.97) 311–5
Questions
Cross border cooperation in Ireland 331w
Northern Ireland government 421

Belmarsh Prison
Prison accommodation 289w
Prison education services 429w
Prisoners' release 700w

Benefits Agency
see Social Security Benefits Agency

Benefits Agency district offices
Camborne 532w

Benefits Agency Medical Service
Contracts for services 203–7w, 310–1w

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Debates etc.
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Hormone treatments (24.02.97) 127

Beresford, Sir Paul, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment
Debates etc.
Councillors, Points of order (05.03.97) 911
Questions
Avon ring road 462w
Barnet Borough Council, Direct labour departments 602w
Billing, Dept of the Environment 731w
British Agrochemicals' Association 217w
Civil service agencies, Dept of the Environment 218w
Contracts for services, Dept of the Environment 460–1w
Council tax, Essex 595w
Councillors, Legal costs 219w
Dockyards, Newham 694–5
Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969 729w
Employment agencies, Dept of the Environment 5–6w
Genetically modified organisms, Environment protection 732w
Genetics, Cancer hazards 731w
Government grants to local authorities, Wolverhampton 218–20w
Hazardous materials, Dept of the Environment 216–7w
Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981, Schools 600–1w
Industrial health and safety, Surveys 5w
Local government, Legislation 597–8w
Local government expenditure 6–7w
Local government finance 594w
Local government staff 599–600w
Lost working days, Stress related illnesses 8w
Non-metropolitan counties 730w
Opencast mining 595w
Parliamentary questions, Dept of the Environment 596–7w
Single regeneration budget, Lancashire 600w
Single regeneration budget, Waltham Forest 598–9w
Standard spending assessments 701–2, 704–5
Theft, Dept of the Environment 459w
Tipping of waste, Planning permission 599w
Waltham Forest Housing Action Trust 599w
Wolverhampton Borough Council, Direct labour departments 298–9w

Bermingham, Mr Gerald
Questions
Broadmoor Hospital 659w
Broadmoor Hospital, Inquiries 658–9w
European communities, Information services 5

Berry, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Avon ring road (06.03.97) 1126–30
Questions
Abbey Wood 589w
Avon ring road 462w

Berry, Mr Roger—continued
Handicapped, Parents 443–4w
Local government reform, Glamorgan 533w
Non-metropolitan counties 730w

Berwickshire
Pesca initiative 35–6w

Betting shops
Licensing (26.02.97) 396

Betts, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1077
Questions
Billing, Attorney General 708–9w
Billing, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 691w
Billing, Dept of Health 740–1w
Billing, Dept of Social Security 719w
Billing, Dept of the Environment 731w
Billing, Dept of Trade and Industry 704w
Billing, Dept of Transport 714w
Billing, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 702w
Billing, Home Office 700w
Billing, Lord Chancellor's Dept 691–2w
Billing, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 748w
Billing, Ministry of Defence 711w
Billing, Northern Ireland Office 722w
Billing, Scottish Office 688–9w
Billing, Welsh Office 726w
Connective tissue, Diseases 738–9w
Hereditary diseases 739w
Prosthetics 739w
Public sector housing 595w

Billing
Attorney General 708–9w
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 691w
Dept of Health 740–1w
Dept of Social Security 719w
Dept of the Environment 731w
Dept of Trade and Industry 704w
Dept of Transport 714w
European Commission 619w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 702w
Government departments 139w
Home Office 700w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 691–2w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 748w
Ministry of Defence 711w
Northern Ireland Office 722w
Scottish Office 688–9w
Welsh Office 726w

Biodiversity
466w

Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
Scientists 482w

Birds
Kent 572w
Pest control 298w, 572w

Birds (Registration Charges) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* and Ways and means res* (24.02.97) 122

Birmingham
Educational finance 260w
Local government finance 693

Birmingham City Council
Contracts for services 426

Birmingham relief road
418w

Birmingham University
Industrial health and safety 731w

Bishops
65–6w

Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Questions
Armed forces medical services 424–5
London Underground, Privatisation 144–5
NHS 706–8
Slaughterhouses, Food hygiene 1018–20

Blakelaw School Newcastle
29w

Blood
570w

Blood donors
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 382w, 517w

Blood transfusion services
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 517w
Wales 91w

Blunkett, Mr David
Questions
Class sizes, Primary education 329
Primary education 415–7w
Primary education, Educational standards 30w

Blyth Valley
EC grants and loans 619w

Board of Inland Revenue
see Inland Revenue

Boarding schools
Armed forces education allowances 369w

Boateng, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Civil Procedures Bill (HL), 3R (25.02.97) 213
Questions
Arrests 130w
Courts, Aids for handicapped 287w
Cryptosporidia, Water supply 657w, 737–8w
Legal aid scheme 621
Prosecutions 187–9w

Body searches
Long Lartin Prison 214–6w

Bombings
African National Congress 128–9w
Lockerbie 419–20w, 524–5w, 706w, 883–4, 1021–2
London Docklands 298w
Manchester 298w

Bonsor, Sir Nicholas, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Debates etc.
NATO (26.02.97) 274–6
Questions
Albania 56w, 223w
Albania, Official gifts 314w
Albania, Overseas aid 702w
British Petroleum, Colombia 55w
Germany, Refugees 223w
Government Hospitality Fund, Efficiency scrutinies 148w
Latin America 57w
Parliamentary questions, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 222–3w
Peace keeping operations, Armed forces deployment 617–8w
UN resolutions 701w
UNESCO 57w

Booth, Mr Hartley
Debates etc.
Business questions (06.03.97) 1042

Booth, Mr Hartley—continued
Empty housing (25.02.97) 249–51
NHS (24.02.97) 38, 66
Road Traffic Reduction Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 583–7
United Kingdom Membership of European Union (Research) Bill, 1R (04.03.97) 711–2
Questions
EC Committee of the Regions, Scotland 884
Food industry, EC law 743w
Social fund 285–6w
Sportsgrounds 497w

Borders region
Council tax capping 886–7

Boswell, Mr Tim, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food
Questions
Age, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 77–8w
Agricultural Development and Advisory Service, Privatisation 748w
Agricultural policy 512w
Billing, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 748w
Civil service agencies, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 512w
Consultants, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 78w
Contracts for services, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 512–3w
Countryside stewardship scheme 80w
Employment agencies, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 321–2w
Food industry, EC law 743w
Hedges and ditches, Nature conservation 744w
Hill farming, Agricultural subsidies 741–2w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Operating costs 748w
Organic food 1008–9
Parliamentary questions, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 194w
Set-aside schemes, Nature conservation 745w
Theft, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 322w

Bottomley, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 158
Questions
Dept for Education and Employment, Cash limits 369–70w
Electorate 4–5w
Inflation 493w
Pensioners, Personal income 525–6w
Statistics 19w, 307w
Unemployment 15w
Unpaid taxes, Tax collection 135w

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia, Secretary of State for National Heritage
Questions
BBC, Digital television 499w
Dept of National Heritage, Public appointments 300–1w
Film industry 609–10
Government grants to voluntary organisations 393–5w
Millennium, Wales 500w
Millennium Commission, British Waterways Board 498w
Millennium Commission, Plymouth 613
Millennium Exhibition 146w
National Lottery 498–9w, 615–9

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia—continued
National Lottery, Disaster relief 611
National Lottery, Worcestershire 498w
Pop stars 619
"Success through Partnership: a Strategy for Tourism" 614–5
Television programmes 499w
Tourism, East Midlands 498w
Tourism, Government grants 613–4

Bournemouth
Dept for Education and Employment 148–9w
Grant maintained schools 327

Bovine somatotropin
513w

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
78–9w, 427–8, 570–1w, 674w, 745w, 1010, 1017
Animal feed 80w, 1011
Compensation 78w, 195w, 683–4w
Disease control 190w, 193–4w, 398–9w, 683–4w, 1005–6, 1013–4
Northern Ireland 93–5w, 329w
UK repayments from EC budget 571w
Wales 668w
Waste disposal 79w, 190–3w, 371w, 746w

Bowden, Sir Andrew
Questions
Income support, Capital rules 199–200w
Income support, Pensioners 562w
Pensioners, Personal income 525w
Pensioners, Standard of living 311–2w

Bowis, Mr John, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Transport
Debates etc.
Air safety (26.02.97) 299–302
Questions
A13, Bridges 53w
Air safety 609–10w
Air traffic control, North Sea 545w
Air traffic control, Scotland 141w, 549w
Billing, Dept of Transport 714w
Bus crews, Greater London 502w
Buses, Safety belts 270w
Central line, Privatisation 546w
Civil service agencies, Dept of Transport 53w
Coastguard Agency, Annual reports 610w
Contracts for services, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 295–6w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept of Transport 545w
Driving tests, Eye disorders 50w
Government research establishments, Crowthorne 551w
Jubilee line 504w
London Buses, Subsidies 550w
London Transport Museum 549w
London Underground, Advertising 548w
London Underground, Finance 502–3w
London Underground, Investment 503w, 548–9w
London Underground, Loans 418w
London Underground, Marketing 549w
London Underground, Performance standards 504w
London Underground, Privatisation 503–4w, 547–8w, 715w
London Underground, Rents 549w
Lorries, Motor vehicle safety 502w
MFV Pescado, Shipping accidents 296–7w
Millennium Exhibition, Railway stations 269–70w
MV Braer, Oil pollution 418w
MV Sea Empress, Oil pollution 49–50w
MV Sea Empress, Salvage 50w

Bowis, Mr John*—*continued
Parliamentary questions, Dept of Transport 269w
Petrol alternatives, Exhaust emission controls 53w
Rescue services 610–1w
Road accidents, Drugs 48–9w
Road tax, Fraud 546–7w
Road traffic control 545w
Road traffic control, Research 545–6w
Road Traffic (New Drivers) Act 1995, Publicity 501–2w
Roll-on roll-off ships, Shipping safety 609w, 714w
Sea pollution 611w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 552w
Taxis, North Lincolnshire District Council 550w
Theft, Dept of Transport 54w
Tugboats 53–4w

Boyd-Carpenter Board
see Family Law Advisory Board

Bradfield House School Cullompton
414–5w, 631–2w

Braer
see MV Braer

Brandreth, Mr Gyles, An Assistant Whip
Debates etc.
Wales (27.02.97) 524

Bray, Dr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 629–30
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1027–8

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 442
Business questions (06.03.97) 1040
NATO (26.02.97) 270–1
Questions
Cultural heritage 607
Offenders, Legal costs 505w

Brazil
Overseas aid 13

Breast cancer
Screening 657w

Breasts
Plastic surgery 70w

Brewing industry
Office of Fair Trading 583w

Bridges
A13 53w

Bridgewater, Carl
698w

Bristol
Educational finance 701–2

British Academy of Sport
34w, 274w, 499w, 624w

British Agrochemicals Association
217w, 622w

British Boadcasting Corporation
see BBC

British Gas plc (Rateable Values) Amendment Order 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 679

British Gas plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Amendment Order 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 679

British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
Rep* and 3R* (28.02.97) 594

British Petroleum
Colombia 55w

British Rail
Redundancy 50–1w
York 51w

British Rail Engineering
York 51–2w

British Railways Board
External financing limits 715w

British Waterways Board
External financing limits 220w
Government grants 7–8w
Millennium Commission 498w

Broadcasting controls
BBC 32–3w

Broadmoor Hospital
520–1w, 659w
Inquiries 521w, 658–9w

Bron Dyffryn Special School
468w

Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 154
Political refugees (05.03.97) 838, 845–8
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1100–3, 1105, 1111
Questions
Deregulation initiative, Licensing laws 7–8

Brown, Mr Michael
Questions
Economic and monetary union, Fiscal policy 490w
Identity cards 537–8w
Police national computer, Sexuality 463w
Schools, Humberside 263w
Stowaways 428
Taxis, North Lincolnshire District Council 550w

Browning, Mrs Angela, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Questions
Agricultural chemicals 681–2w
Agricultural chemicals, Taxation 674–5w
Animal diseases, Compensation 78w, 682–4w
Animal feed, EC action 321w
Animal quarantine, Codes of practice 194w, 326–7w, 747w
Animal welfare 746w
Animals, Identification 1016–7
Baby milks 746w
Battery hens, Animal welfare 743w
Beef, Armed forces catering services 1017
Beef, Exports 1016
Beef, Imports 76w
Birds, Pest control 572w
Bovine somatotropin 513w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 570–1w, 1017
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Animal feed 80w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, UK repayments from EC budget 571w
Export of live animals 76–8w, 327w
Export of live animals, Kent 747–8w
Export of live animals, Pigs 329w
Export of live animals, Sheep 748w
Food 744w

Browning, Mrs Angela*—*continued
Food hygiene 681w
Food hygiene, Charities 79–80w
Food imports 743w
Food industry, Chocolate 744w
Food industry, Safety standards 194–5w
Food labelling 1007
Genetically modified organisms, Import controls 79w, 513w
Nature conservation, Clones 571w
Parasitic diseases, Research 328w
Pig diseases 573w
Pig diseases, Germany 747w
Rabies 514w
Rabies, Europe 573w
Rodents, Poisoning 195w
Sheep diseases, Disease control 675w
Sheep scab 327–8w
Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, Parliamentary questions 1016
Vitamin B6 680–1w

Bruce, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 634–5
Questions
Educational finance, Northern Ireland 418
Electricity interconnectors, Northern Ireland 331w
Fishing quotas 1012
Income support, Pensioners 137–8
NHS finance, Scotland 897–8
Unemployment 331

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1087–91, 1122–3
Questions
Cost per pupil, Scotland 900–1
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 302w
Inheritance tax, Art works 306w
Offshore structures, Scotland 233–4w
Public sector assets 236w
Self-assessment of tax 405w

Bryn-Y-Neuadd Hospital
276–7w

Buckinghamshire
Educational finance 553w

Buckinghamshire Health Authority
Finance 446w

Budgen, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Business questions (06.03.97) 1039
Questions
Immigration controls 706

Building regulations
Fees and charges 155w
Housing and handicapped 601–2w

Building repairs
Armed forces housing 257–8w
NHS 519w
School buildings 260w
VAT 405w

Building Research Establishment
8w
Privatisation (27.02.97) 454–5
Standing Order No 20 applications (27.02.97) 454–5

Bulgaria
Know-how Fund 14

Bull Bars (Prohibition) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 594

Burden, Mr Richard
Questions
Employment protection, Deregulation initiative 292w
Job security 319–20
Local government expenditure 693
Personal pensions 201w

Burma
EC external trade 484w

Burns, Mr Simon, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 76, 81
Political refugees (05.03.97) 856–8
Questions
Ashworth Hospital Inquiry 1997 70–1w
Broadmoor Hospital 520w, 659w
Broadmoor Hospital, Inquiries 658–9w
Children, Departmental coordination 70w
Children, Local government social services 381–2w
Connective tissue, Diseases 738–9w
Deviance and behaviour disorders, Prescription drugs 736w
Ecstasy 442–3w
Elderly, Local government social services 383–4w
Handicapped, Parents 443–4w
Hyperactivity, Medical research 69w
Local government social services, Performance standards 381w
Mental health community care 658w
Mental health services, Finance 442w
Multiple sclerosis, Research finance 439–40w
Overdoses 73w, 738w
Partnership insurance 445w
Residential care, Coventry 180w, 267–8w
Residential care, Suffolk 568–9w
Special hospitals 521w, 737w
Speech therapy 736w
Stress related illnesses 736w

Burt, Mr Alistair, Minister of State, Dept of Social Security
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 76, 98, 109–12
Questions
Age, Dept of Social Security 280–1w
Benefits Agency Medical Service, Contracts for services 203–7w, 310–1w
Billing, Dept of Social Security 719w
Civil service agencies, Dept of Social Security 560–1w
Contracts for services, Dept of Social Security 562w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept of Social Security 278–9w
Dept of Social Security, Parliamentary questions 208w
Employment agencies, Dept of Social Security 88w
Handicap benefits, Earnings rules 88w
Handicap benefits, Social security recipients 639–40w
Handicapped, Discrimination 141–2
Incapacity benefit 201w, 279w, 530w, 639w
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 312–3w
Income support, Pensioners 136–8
Invalid care allowances 207–8w
Invalidity benefits, Therapeutic earnings allowance 525w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Social Security 720w
Publicity, Dept of Social Security 81w
Social security benefits, Expenditure 86w

Burt, Mr Alistair—continued
Social security claims, Cheshire 564w

Bus crews
Greater London 502w

Bus services
Rural areas 546w

Bus Working Group
142–3w

Buses
Safety belts 270w

Business
Ministers' domestic visits 64w, 618–9w, 704w

Business appointments
Hurd, Douglas 1w

Business motions
(06.03.97) 1125

Business statements
(27.02.97) 443–53, (06.03.97) 1036–45

Butcher, Mr John
Questions
Economic growth 147
Residential care, Coventry 180w, 267–8w

Butterfill, Mr John
Questions
Bank of England 423–4

Byers, Mr Stephen
Questions
Allcock, Michael, Prosecutions 405w
Apprentices 338–68w
Business, Ministers' domestic visits 618–9w
Employment 17–8w
"Industrial Action and Trade Unions" 294w
Job security 321
Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise Council 29w
Ministers' visits abroad, Hong Kong 483w, 487–8w
Overseas investment 60w
Tax burden 17w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 29w, 558w
Unemployed, Take-up of employment 495–6w
Unemployment 17w, 141w
Youth employment 139–40w

Cabinet Office
Theft 166w

Caborn, Mr Richard
Questions
Higher education, Physics 557w
Regional electricity companies, Ownership 10–1
Teacher training, Shortage subjects 556–7w

Cairngorms
Railway travel 644w

Callaghan, Mr Jim
Questions
Hospitals, Manchester 1020–1

Camborne
Benefits Agency district offices 532w

Cambridge Military Hospital
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 710w

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Debates etc.
Child prostitution, Public petitions (03.03.97) 680
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Hormone treatments (24.02.97) 130
Electronic government (03.03.97) 632
Questions
Air traffic control, Scotland 141w

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Questions
EC grants and loans, Blyth Valley 619w

Campbell-Savours, Mr Dale
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 633–4
Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (03.03.97) 638
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1056
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1033–4
Questions
Animals, Identification 1016–7
Deregulation initiative 123w
Heath, Edward 146
Legal aid scheme 622–3
National Audit Office 81w
Unemployment, Cumbria 330–1

Canada
Nimrod aircraft 114–5w

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Questions
Devolution, Scotland 889
Health service staff, Scotland 35w
Northern Ireland government 413–4

Cancer
Glan Clwyd Hospital 276w
Hospital patients 657w
Medical treatments 276w

Cancer hazards
Genetics 731w

Cap Afrique
see MV Cap Afrique

Capital challenge
Scotland 889–91

Capital rules
Income support 199–200w

Cardiff
Education vouchers 450w
European Council 156w, 389w
Pre-school education 449w
Territorial Army 257–8w

Career structure
Civil servants 1–2

Carers
Social security benefits 86w

Caribbean
Patrol craft 486w

Carlile, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 436
Wales (27.02.97) 467, 482, 484, 488–92
Questions
Immigrant detainees, Prisoners' transfers 216w
Victim support schemes 538–9w
Young offenders, Administration of justice 464w

Carrickfergus
Housing construction 243w, 335–6w

Carttiss, Mr Michael
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, Eastern region 413w

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 58
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1057
Questions
United Nations, Medals 593w

Cash limits
Dept for Education and Employment 369–70w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 278w

Category A prisoners
Prison visits 289w

Category C prisoners
Prison staff 606w

Cattle
Export of live animals 1012–3

Cellular phones
Disclosure of information 127–8w

Central line
Privatisation 546w

Central Office of Information
Labour costs 125–6w
Theft 166w

Central Science Laboratory
Agricultural research 652–3w

Central Veterinary Laboratory
Scientists 654w, 662–3w, 684–5w

Cerebrovascular diseases
71–2w, 269w

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Billing 691w
Contracts for services 295–6w
Employment agencies 165–6w
Parliamentary questions 618w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Chancery plc
Company liquidations 703w

Channel tunnel
Fires 551w, 714–5w
Railway safety 714w

Chapman, Ben
Members' oath and affirmation (04.03.97) 710

Chapman, Mr Ben
Debates etc.
Members' oath and affirmation, Chapman, Ben (04.03.97) 710

Chapman, Sir Sydney,
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 61–7
Questions
Contracting Out (Functions of Local Authorities in Relation to Income-related Benefits) Order 1997 398w
Legal aid 505w
UN Conference on Environment and Development 695–6

Charities
Food hygiene 79–80w

Chemical weapons
Arms control 488w
Metropolitan Police 538w
Police equipment 3w

Chemical Weapons Convention
488w

Cheshire
Assisted places scheme 555–6w
Class sizes 558w
Grant maintained schools 322–3
Hospital waiting lists 570w
Social security claims 564w

Chidgey, Mr David
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 154–5
Questions
Armed forces cadets, Armed forces training 636–7w
Armed forces cadets, Finance 254–5w
Bus crews, Greater London 502w
Central line, Privatisation 546w
Train operating units, Finance 294–6w

Child abuse
Public petitions (25.02.97) 248
Scotland 451–2w
Teachers 26–7w

Child benefit
Data banks 142–3
Sixth form education 200w

Child care
Disability working allowance 529w
Family credit 529w
Lone parents 140–1

Child prostitution
Public petitions (25.02.97) 248, (03.03.97) 680

Child Support Agency
Administrative delays 82w
Advertising 83w
Debts 198–9w
Fraud 198w
Stress related illnesses 198w

Child workers
Wales 725w

Childbirth
Prisoners 435–6w

Children
Departmental coordination 70w
Local government social services 381–2w
Maintenance 82–5w, 139–40, 198w
Medical treatments 658w
Overseas aid 75w

Chisholm, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Elderly, Scotland (26.02.97) 291–4
Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (26.02.97) 379–81, 386–90
Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 770–5
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 758–60
Scottish Legal Service Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill, Report and 3R (26.02.97) 369–71, 378
Questions
Capital challenge, Scotland 890
Death, Scotland 227–8w
Scottish Ambulance Service, Training 229–31w

Chocolate
Food industry 744w

Church buildings
Cultural heritage 64w
English Heritage 499w

Church Commissioners
Air pollution control 65–6w
Finance 18–20

City Challenge
Stockton 593–4w

City of Westminster
Local government finance 701

Civil Actions (Limit on Proceedings) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
1R (05.03.97) 914–6

Civil disorder
Northern Ireland 239w

Civil Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(26.02.97) 396

Civil Procedure Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
3R (25.02.97) 212–3
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475

Civil proceedings
506w
Hormone treatments 566w

Civil servants
Career structure 1–2
London allowance 287–8w
Pay 125w
Prince's Trust 222w

Civil servants' secondment
Police 433–4w

Civil service agencies
Dept for Education and Employment 552–3w
Dept of Health 180w
Dept of National Heritage 146w
Dept of Social Security 560–1w
Dept of the Environment 218w
Dept of Trade and Industry 169w
Dept of Transport 53w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 56w
Home Office 433w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 512w
Ministry of Defence 118w
Northern Ireland Office 185w
Scottish Office 225–6w
Treasury 490w
Welsh Office 276w

Civil service manpower
Government offices for the regions 292–3w

Clapham, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 223–4
Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill (HL), 2R and money res (25.02.97) 185–7
Questions
Defence land, Radioactive wastes 590w

Clappison, Mr James, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment
Debates etc.
Empty housing (25.02.97) 251–6
Hedges and ditches (26.02.97) 307–10
Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (03.03.97) 657–8
Questions
Air pollution 151–2w, 596w
Air pollution control, Fees and charges 634–5w

***Clappison, Mr James**—continued*
Birds, Pest control 298w
Council house sales 596w
Council housing, Greater London 466w
Council housing, Housing construction 697–9
Countryside Commission, Consultants 466–7w
Countryside Commission, Cultural heritage 466w
Cryptosporidia, Water supply 731w
Domestic energy conservation 217w
Domestic energy consumption, Scotland 635w
Entrust 728–9w
Environment protection, Government grants 217–8w
Fire prevention 219w
Hedges and ditches 602w, 729–30w
Home energy efficiency scheme 154–5w, 221–2w, 730w
Homelessness, Rural areas 733w
Housing and handicapped 698
Housing associations, Hillingdon 698
Landlord and tenant, Housing standards 299–300w
Litter 594w
Nitrogen oxides, Air pollution 600w
Noise 220–1w, 601w
Public sector housing, Waltham Forest 728w
Rents to mortgages scheme 593w
Rivers, Water abstraction 598w
Social rented housing, Expenditure 458–60w
Social rented housing, Lancashire 466w
Tipping of waste 460w
Tipping of waste, Air pollution 460w
Tipping of waste, EC action 459w
Tipping of waste, Methane 459w
UN Conference on Environment and Development 625w, 633–4w
UN Conference on Environment and Development, Dept of the Environment 634w
Water and sewerage companies, Company finance 602w
Water resources 221w
Water supply industry, Government grants 464w
Wood 600w

Clark, Dr David
Questions
Armed forces housing, House purchase 404w
Armed forces training, Harrogate 638w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 371w
Defence costs study 402w
Gulf war syndrome 545w
Military aircraft, Air accidents 404w

Clark, Dr Michael
Questions
Housing 1022
Road Traffic (New Drivers) Act 1995, Publicity 501–2w

Clarke, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 723, 746–9
Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill (HL), 2R and money res (25.02.97) 177–9, 193
Questions
Animal experiments, Scotland 687–8w
Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, Hospital closures 522w

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Debates etc.
Building Societies Bill, 1R (28.02.97) 525
Questions
Economic and monetary union 490w
Economic and monetary union, Fiscal policy 490w
London Transport, Finance 533w
Public Works Loan Board, Local authorities 617w

Clarke, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 44, 53–7, 104–9, 112

Class sizes
Cheshire 558w
Primary education 259w, 327–9
Scotland 38w
Wales 726w

Clelland, Mr David
Questions
Employment, Lone parents 137w

Clergy
Labour costs 66w
Pensions 65w

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 440
Business questions (06.03.97) 1043–4
Questions
Family benefits 133
Fire Service College, Government grants 700–1w
Teachers, Performance appraisal 898–9

"Climate Change the UK Programme"
633w

Clones
148
Nature conservation 571w

Closed circuit television
Crime prevention 540w
Tamworth 129w
West Midlands 129w

Clwyd
Pupil exclusions 447w

Clwyd, Ann
Debates etc.
NATO (26.02.97) 260–3
Questions
Absent voting, Election offences 3w, 129–30w
Arms control negotiations, Mines 11–2
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 18
Cellular phones, Disclosure of information 127–8w
Child workers, Wales 725w
Indonesia, Police training 75–6w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Compensation 701–2w
Parliamentary questions, Attorney General 235w
Parliamentary questions, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 618w
Parliamentary questions, Dept for Education and Employment 262w
Parliamentary questions, Dept of the Environment 596–7w
Parliamentary questions, Dept of Transport 269w
Parliamentary questions, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 222–3w
Parliamentary questions, Home Office 432w
Parliamentary questions, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 194w

***Clwyd, Ann**—continued*
Parliamentary questions, Ministry of Defence 590w
Parliamentary questions, Northern Ireland Office 240w
Parliamentary questions, Prime Minister 320w
Parliamentary questions, Scottish Office 687w
Parliamentary questions, Treasury 303–4w
Parliamentary questions, Welsh Office 276w

Clyde submarine base
117w

Coastguard Agency
Annual reports 610w

Coffey, Ms Ann
Debates etc.
Political refugees (05.03.97) 854–6
Questions
Broadmoor Hospital 520–1w
Broadmoor Hospital, Inquiries 521w
Elderly, Local government social services 383–4w
Special hospitals 521w

Cohen, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Libyan Arab Republic, Sanctions (28.02.97) 600–1
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 162
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 932
Questions
Chemical weapons, Arms control 488w
Immigrant detainees, Hunger strikes 603w
Iraq, Overseas aid 75w
London Transport, Finance 533w
Nuclear weapons, Russia 588w
Police custody, Death 129w
Prisons, Ships 212w
Social security benefits, Political refugees 138

Coke
Air pollution 152w

Cold weather payments
Wales 718w

Colombia
British Petroleum 55w

Colvin, Mr Michael
Questions
British Waterways Board, Government grants 7–8w

Comber
Road accidents 96w

Commission of the European Communities
see European Commission

Committee of Inquiry into the Personality Disorder Unit at Ashworth Special Hospital
see Ashworth Hospital Inquiry 1997

Committee on Safety of Medicines
Public appointments 517–9w

Common agricultural policy
1009–10
Cornwall 399w
Devon 399w

Common fisheries policy
1011–2

Community care
Local government expenditure 697

Community councils
Scotland 649w

Community hospitals
Wales 275w

Community Hygiene Concern
Government grants 736w

Companies House
170–1w

Companies House Executive Agency
see Companies House

Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Rep adjourned (28.02.97) 591–3

Companies Registration Office (England and Wales)
see Companies House

Company Accounts (Disclosure of Directors Emoluments) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 665–78

Company finance
Water and sewerage companies 602w

Company liquidations
Chancery plc 703w

Compost
597w

Comprehensive test ban treaty
483w

Comptroller and Auditor General
see National Audit Office

Computer privacy
EC law 540w

Computer software
Vocational training 263w

Computers
Millennium 60w, (28.02.97) 591–3

Concessionary television licences
Wales 396w

Conference on disarmament
483w

Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Rep* and 3R (28.02.97) 552–74

Congdon, Mr David
Debates etc.
Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 553, 556–8
NHS (24.02.97) 70–6, 80
Prisons (Alcohol Testing) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 529–30, 533–4
Road Traffic Reduction Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 578–9, 585–7
Questions
Educational standards 425
Job security 321
Light dues 716w
Local authority powers 9
Metropolitan Police 214w
NHS trusts, Debts 180w
Rough sleepers initiative 635–6w
Scottish Grand Committee 643w
Standard spending assessments 705

Congenital abnormalities
German measles 520w

Connarty, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 919
Questions
Airport tax, Tax yields 535w
Beef, Exports 745w
Northern Ireland Office, Public expenditure 243–4w
Water supply industry, Scotland 642–3w

Connective tissue
Diseases 738–9w

Conservative Party
708
Finance 8, 314w, 708–9

Consolidated Fund (No 2) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (06.03.97) 1125

Constitutions
Jersey 132w

Construction costs
New Parliamentary Building 222w

Consultants
Countryside Commission 466–7w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 78w
Treasury 496w

Consumer expenditure
Wales 140–1w

Contracting Out (Functions of Local Authorities in Relation to Income-related Benefits) Order 1997
Questions
398w

Contracting Out (Functions of the Registrar General in Relation to Authorising Re-registration of Births) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 679

Contracts
Inland Revenue 494–5w
Overseas aid 541–2w

Contracts for services
Benefits Agency Medical Service 203–7w, 310–1w
Birmingham City Council 426
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 295–6w
Crown Prosecution Service 471–2w
Dept for Education and Employment 413–4w
Dept of Health 380–2w
Dept of National Heritage 273w
Dept of Social Security 562w
Dept of the Environment 460–1w
Dept of Trade and Industry 411–2w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 420–2w
Home Office 536–7w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 507w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 512–3w
Ministry of Defence 256–7w
Northern Ireland Housing Executive 574w
Social Security Benefits Agency 529–30w, 561w

Contracts of employment
Science and technology research 480–1w

Convictions
Scotland 157w

Cook, Frank
Questions
Swan Hunter Shipbuilders 245–6w

Coombs, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 635
Questions
Income tax, Scotland 646w
Millennium, Northern Ireland 330w
Retirement pensions 1017–8
"Success through Partnership: a Strategy for Tourism" 614–5

Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee
see Ministerial Committee on Coordination and Presentaion of Government Policy

Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Debates etc.
Avon ring road (06.03.97) 1130
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1026
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 1005–6

Copyright
Video recordings 585w

Corbett, Mr Robin
Questions
Religious education 330
Royal yacht 378w

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Political refugees (05.03.97) 841–5, 850, 854
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 921, 955
Questions
Brazil, Overseas aid 13
Community Hygiene Concern, Government grants 736w
Goktepe, Metin, Homicide 424w
Health physics, Compensation 121–2w
Incapacity benefit 530w
Ivory Coast, Human rights 468w
Jobseeker's allowance 258w, 470–1w
Jobseeker's allowance, Disabled workers 471w
North London railway line 272w
Pensioners, Personal income 201w
Set-aside schemes, Nature conservation 745w

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 630
Questions
Animal quarantine, Codes of practice 747w
Church Commissioners, Finance 20
Fishing 612
House of Commons Committees of the Whole House 708
Intelligence and Security Committee, Annual reports 2w
Standard spending assessments 702

Cornwall
Common agricultural policy 399w

Coroners
606w

Corston, Jean
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 751

Corston, Jean*—*continued
Questions
Malaria, Aircrew 180w
Malaria, Drug side effects 267w, 379–80w
National insurance contributions 308–9w
Personal income 134w
Standard spending assessments 701–2

Cost per pupil
Local education authorities 627–30w
Scotland 899–901

Couchman, Mr James
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 435–6
NHS (24.02.97) 34, 71, 75, 84–7
Questions
Antidumping duties 472–8w
Antidumping duties, Office equipment 472w

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Northern Ireland 336w, 511w

Council house sales
596w
Wales 387w

Council house waiting lists
Scotland 43w

Council housing
Greater London 466w
Housing construction 697–9

Council housing finance
461–2w, 699–700

Council of Ministers
315–9w

Council tax
Essex 595w
Multiple occupation 299w
Scotland 886–8

Council tax benefits
281w

Council tax capping
Borders region 886–7

Councillors
Legal costs 219w

Countryside Commission
Consultants 466–7w
Cultural heritage 466w

Countryside premium scheme
Scotland 41w

Countryside stewardship scheme
80w

County courts
Closures 691w
Rochdale 691w

Courts
Administrative delays 508w
Aids for handicapped 287w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Company Accounts (Disclosure of Directors Emoluments) Regulations (03.03.97) 666–7, 670, 674–7
Electronic government (03.03.97) 632–3
Questions
Blakelaw School Newcastle 29w
Blood 570w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1010
Central Office of Information, Labour costs 125–6w
Cerebrovascular diseases 269w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Blood donors 382w
Government buildings, Riyadh 404w
Hurd, Douglas, Business appointments 1w

Cousins, Mr Jim*—*continued
Hypertension 269w
Insurance companies 4w, 250–1w
Mines, Treaties 120w
Northern Electric, Shareholders 59–60w
Pensions 89–90w
Qatar, Ministers' visits abroad 57–8w
Teachers' pensions 27–8w

Coventry
Residential care 180w, 267–8w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Arms trade 478–9w
Beef, Exports 1016
Council housing, Greater London 466w
Dentists, Wandsworth 382w
Fire prevention 219w
Korean War, Military decorations 118w
Magistrates' courts, Prosecutions 21w
Metropolitan Police, Chemical weapons 538w
Nuclear power stations, Decommissioning 478w
Patrol craft, Caribbean 486w
Political refugees, Sri Lanka 2–3w
Prison rules 434w
Prison visits, Drug crimes 437–8w
Prisons, Construction 436w
Prisons, Drug seizures 438–9w
Special schools, Greater London 265w
Sri Lanka, Diplomatic service 55w
Television licences, Fine defaulters 695w
Young offenders, Legal aid 399w

Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia
73w, 442w
Blood donors 382w, 517w
Blood transfusion services 517w
Hormone treatments (24.02.97) 123–30, 183w, 568w

Crewe
National Lottery 624w

Crime
Environment protection 703
London Underground 52w
Railway stations 52w
Scotland 157w

Crime prevention
Closed circuit television 540w
Young offenders 127w, 539–40w

Crimes of violence
Accident and emergency departments 71w
Northern Ireland 413, 660w

Criminal appeals
King, Fiona 708w
Kyle, David 708w

Criminal injuries compensation
Sexual offences 131–2w

Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996
Questions
291–2w

Criminal proceedings
Customs and Excise 406–7w
Evidence 291–2w

Criminal records
Voluntary work 463w, 700w

Critchley, Sir Julian
Questions
NATO 487w

Cross border cooperation in Ireland
330–1w

Crown Prosecution Service
Contracts for services 471–2w

Crowthorne
Government research establishments 551w

Croydon
Gaming clubs 538w

Cryptosporidia
Thames Water 657w
Three Valleys Water Services 732–3w
Water supply 657w, 731w, 737–8w

Crystal Palace
Sports centres 32w, 608

Cuba
International trade 61w

Cullompton
Youth courts 505w

Cultural heritage
607–8
Church buildings 64w
Countryside Commission 466w
National Lottery (25.02.97) 198–211

Cumbria
Unemployment 330–1

Cunliffe, Mr Lawrence
Questions
National Lottery 619
Overseas aid 16

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 39
Questions
British Academy of Sport 274w
Departmental responsibilities, Local government 122w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 335
Housing benefits 641w
Housing benefits, Mentally ill 641w
Mental health community care 658w
National Lottery, Sports 274w
Retirement pensions 564w
Social rented housing, Expenditure 458–60w
Sports, Students 624w
Sports, Young people 623–4w, 693w

Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Questions
Dept of National Heritage, Public appointments 300–1w
Firing ranges, Eskmeals 251w
National Lottery 615, 618
Weapons, Testing 370–1w

Cunningham, Roseanna
Debates etc.
Elderly, Scotland (26.02.97) 284–7
Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (26.02.97) 393–4
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 748
National Heritage Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 198–200, 207
Questions
Capital challenge, Scotland 890–1
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Hormone treatments 183w
Employment, Scotland 644w
Hormone treatments 183w
Hormone treatments, Scotland 234w
Hunterston B, Radiation hazards 908
Jobseeker's allowance 632–3w

Curriculum
28w
First aid 556w

Currie, Mrs Edwina
Debates etc.
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Hormone treatments (24.02.97) 126
Questions
European Movement 1021

Curry, Rt Hon David, Minister of State, Dept of the Environment
Questions
Bombings, Manchester 298w
Community care, Local government expenditure 697
Council housing finance 461–2w, 699–700
Estates renewal challenge fund, Manchester 297–8w
Housing Corporation, Loans 732w
Local government finance 8–9w, 594w
Public sector housing 595–6w
Rough sleepers initiative 635–6w
South Yorkshire Supertram 297w
Standard spending assessments, Rural areas 703–4
Standard spending assessments, Warwickshire 704

Customs and Excise
Criminal proceedings 406–7w

Cyprus
(03.03.97) 681–92

Dafis, Mr Cynog
Questions
School discipline 326–7

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 448, (06.03.97) 1040
Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance) Bill, Rep adjourned (28.02.97) 592
Gulf war syndrome, Points of order (27.02.97) 456
Hedges and ditches (26.02.97) 309–10
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, Points of order (26.02.97) 337, 341, (28.02.97) 528
Libyan Arab Republic, Sanctions (28.02.97) 598–600
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 719
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 158, 165
Prisons (Alcohol Testing) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 532–3, 543, 547–8, 550
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1051, 1120
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1034
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Prisoners 331w, 403–4w
Child Support Agency, Stress related illnesses 198w
Fish conservation 743w
Hunterston B, Radiation hazards 907–8
International trade, Cuba 61w
Latin America 57w
Lockerbie, Bombings 419–20w, 524–5w, 706w, 883, 1021–2
London Underground, Tunnels 501w
Prison visits, Video recordings 288–9w
Teachers, Early retirement 261w
Water resources 221w

Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* (28.02.97) 595

Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1075–6, 1108–18, 1121
Questions
Scottish Office, Publicity 163–5w

Dartford-Thurrock Crossing (Amendment) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 596

Data banks
Child benefit 142–3

Data Protection Registrar
Pay (24.02.97) 122

Davidson, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Scottish Legal Service Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill, Report and 3R (26.02.97) 376, 378
Questions
Industrial health and safety, Surveys 5w
Shipbuilding, Scotland 643w

Davies, Mr Bryan
Questions
Employment, EC countries 334
Sixth form education, School population 555w

Davies, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Local Government (Conduct of Officers) Bill, 1R (25.02.97) 166–8
Questions
Class sizes, Primary education 327–8
Clones 148
Electric cables 61w
Pensions, EC countries 88–9w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Debates etc.
Wales (27.02.97) 479–84, 503, 516
Welsh Development Agency Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.97) 796

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 351–5, 361
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1060–1
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1029–30

Davies, Mr Ron
Questions
Grazing land, Wales 91w
St Asaph Business Park, Foreign investment in UK 726w

Davis, Rt Hon David, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Debates etc.
Cyprus (03.03.97) 689–92
Questions
Burma, EC external trade 484w
Comprehensive test ban treaty 483w
Conference on disarmament 483w
Council of Ministers 315–9w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 425–8w
EC institutions, Information services 425w, 484w
EC institutions, Operating costs 484w
European communities, Publicity 56–7w
European Parliament Members, Labour costs 58w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, European Council 314w
Goktepe, Metin, Homicide 424w
Spain 57w

Day, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 932–3

Death
Northern Ireland 241–3w
Pneumonia 615–6w
Police custody 129w, 437w
Saunders, Philip 538w
Scotland 226–8w
Wales 665–7w, 724w
Weather 226w, 490–1w, 665–6w

Death rate
237w, 303–5w, 491–2w

Debts
Child Support Agency 198–9w
NHS trusts 180w

Debts written off
Railtrack 611w

Dee estuary
Environment protection 277–8w

Deeside
Power stations 278w, 448w

Defamation
Legal advice and assistance 13w

Defence costs study
402w

Defence equipment
RAF Spadeadam 114w

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency
Privatisation 712w

Defence expenditure
Nuclear submarines 109w
Nuclear weapons 117–8w

Defence land
109–11w
Radioactive wastes 590w

Defence procurement
Mines 120w

Defence research
Radium 586w

Defence Secondary Care Agency
186–8w

Deferred pensions
145w

Demonstrations
Road construction 85–6w

Denham, Mr John
Questions
Pensioners, Personal income 284–6w
Pensions 719w
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits uprating 135
State earnings related pension scheme 90w

Dental charges
568w

Dental services
66–7w
Laboratories 566–8w
Manpower 65–6w
Scotland 454–5w

Dentists
Wandsworth 382w

Departmental coordination
124w
Children 70w
Economic and monetary union 8–9
Economic policy 3
Social security benefits 197–8w

Departmental publications
Law of war 403w

Departmental responsibilities
Dept of Social Security 278–9w
Dept of Transport 545w
Local government 122w

Deportation
605–6w

Dept for Education and Employment
Bournemouth 148–9w
Cash limits 369–70w
Civil service agencies 552–3w
Contracts for services 413–4w
Parliamentary questions 262w
Private finance initiative 706w
Theft 264w

Dept of Health
Age 67w
Billing 740–1w
Civil service agencies 180w
Contracts for services 380–2w
Private finance initiative 740w
Theft 268w

Dept of National Heritage
Civil service agencies 146w
Contracts for services 273w
Employment agencies 31–2w
Public appointments 300–1w
Theft 146w

Dept of Social Security
Age 280–1w
Billing 719w
Civil service agencies 560–1w
Contracts for services 562w
Departmental responsibilities 278–9w
Employment agencies 88w
Environmental audit 639w
Hazardous materials 527w
Parliamentary questions 208w
Private finance initiative 720w
Publicity 81w
Scottish Grand Committee 309–10w
Theft 717w

Dept of the Environment
Billing 731w
Civil service agencies 218w
Contracts for services 460–1w
Employment agencies 5–6w
Hazardous materials 216–7w
Parliamentary questions 596–7w
Private finance initiative 730–1w
Theft 459w
UN Conference on Environment and Development 634w

Dept of Trade and Industry
Age 479w
Billing 704w
Civil service agencies 169w
Contracts for services 411–2w
Employment agencies 408–11w
Government offices for the regions 292–3w
Private finance initiative 703w
Publicity 177–9w
Theft 176w

Dept of Transport
Billing 714w
Civil service agencies 53w
Departmental responsibilities 545w
Parliamentary questions 269w
Private finance initiative 713w
Theft 54w

Deputy Prime Minister
Ministerial policy advisors 124w
Scottish Grand Committee 1w

Dera Radiation Protection Services
400–2w

Deregulation (Betting Licensing) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(26.02.97) 396

Deregulation initiative
123w, 166–7w
Animal feed 6–7
Employment protection 292w
Leisure 7
Licensing laws 7–8
Rural areas 122w
Small businesses 5–7

Deva, Mr Nirj Joseph
Debates etc.
Air safety (26.02.97) 297–9

Development aid
150–1w

Deviance and behaviour disorders
Prescription drugs 736w

Devlin, Mr Tim
Questions
City Challenge, Stockton 593–4w
Landlord and tenant, Housing standards 299–300w

Devolution
Scotland 146–7, 888–9

Devon
Common agricultural policy 399w
Housing benefits 528w

Devonport Dockyard
Hazardous materials 257w, 586w

Digital television
BBC 499w

Dignity at Work Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 595

Diplomatic service
422–4w
Sri Lanka 55w

Dir76/115/EEC
270w

Dir84/360/EEC
152w

Dir88/609/EEC
152w

Dir89/130/EURATOM/EEC
489–90w

Dir91/628/EEC
747–8w

Dir92/100/EEC
585w

Dir94/22/EC
583–4w

Dir94/62/EC
(03.03.97) 637–58

Dir95/46/EC
540w

Dir96/61/EC
152w

Direct labour departments
Barnet Borough Council 602w
Wolverhampton Borough Council 298–9w

Director General of Fair Trading
see Office of Fair Trading

Disability appeal tribunals
564–5w
Newport Gwent 642w

Disability Discrimination Act 1995
Questions
141–2

Disability living allowance
209–10w
Northern Ireland 97–9w
Wales 275w

Disability working allowance
88w
Child care 529w
Earnings rules 88w

Disabled Persons and Carers (Short-Term Breaks) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 595

Disabled workers
Jobseeker's allowance 471w

Disaster relief
National Lottery 611
Rwanda 75w

Discrimination
Handicapped 141–2

Disease control
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 190w, 193–4w, 398–9w, 683–4w, 1005–6, 1013–4
Sheep diseases 675w

Diseases
Connective tissue 738–9w

District health authorities
Administrative costs 94w
Wales 94w

Divorce settlements
Pension rights 285w

Dobson, Mr Frank
Questions
Jubilee line 504w
Standard spending assessments 702

Dockyards
Newham 694–5

Doctors
Manpower 734–5w
Resignations 657w

Dogs
(28.02.97) 595

Domestic energy conservation
217w

Domestic energy consumption
Scotland 635w
VAT 560w

Donohoe, Mr Brian H
Questions
Civil service agencies, Dept for Education and Employment 552–3w
Civil service agencies, Dept of Health 180w
Civil service agencies, Dept of National Heritage 146w
Civil service agencies, Dept of Social Security 560–1w
Civil service agencies, Dept of the Environment 218w
Civil service agencies, Dept of Trade and Industry 169w
Civil service agencies, Dept of Transport 53w
Civil service agencies, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 56w
Civil service agencies, Home Office 433w
Civil service agencies, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 512w

Donohoe, Mr Brian H—continued
Civil service agencies, Ministry of Defence 118w
Civil service agencies, Northern Ireland Office 185w
Civil service agencies, Scottish Office 225–6w
Civil service agencies, Treasury 490w
Civil service agencies, Welsh Office 276w
Inland Revenue, Contracts 494–5w
Scottish Grand Committee, Dept of Social Security 309–10w
Scottish Grand Committee, Home Office 127w
Scottish Grand Committee, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 80w
Scottish Grand Committee, Ministry of Defence 107w
Scottish Grand Committee, Northern Ireland Office 100w
Scottish Grand Committee, Prime Minister 1w
Scottish Grand Committee, Scottish Office 35w
Vaccination, Travel requirements 67–8w

Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen, Secretary of State for Health
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 24–5, 32–44
Questions
Broadmoor Hospital 521w
Broadmoor Hospital, Inquiries 521w
NHS trusts, Debts 180w

Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James, Minister of State, Scottish Office
Debates etc.
Contract (Scotland) Bill, 3R (26.02.97) 368
Elderly, Scotland (26.02.97) 294–6
M80 (05.03.97) 877–82
Scottish Legal Service Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill, Report and 3R (26.02.97) 372–3, 376–8
Questions
Age, Scottish Office 521w
Billing, Scottish Office 688–9w
Civil service agencies, Scottish Office 225–6w
Convictions, Scotland 157w
Crime, Scotland 157w
Death, Scotland 227–8w
Death, Weather 226w
Dental services, Scotland 454–5w
Duff, William 452–4w
Dumfries and Galloway Health Board, Finance 646w
Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, Hospital closures 522w
Electorate, Scotland 231w
Electronic tagging, Scotland 391w, 646w
Food poisoning, Scotland 523w
Health service staff, Scotland 35w
Health services, Scotland 646w
Hormone treatments, Scotland 234w
Hospices, Scotland 891
Hospital beds, Scotland 37–8w
Hospital patients, Weather 229–30w
Legal aid, Scotland 157–8w
Lockerbie, Bombings 524–5w, 883–4
M74 231w
Medical treatments, Weather 228–9w
Motorways, Scotland 390–1w
Nazi war crimes, Prosecutions 392w
NHS finance, Scotland 896–8
NHS trusts, Scotland 43w
Nutrition and health, Scotland 649–52w

Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James—continued
Parliamentary questions, Scottish Office 687w
Police, Scotland 157w
Police stations, Easterhouse 225w
Post codes, Scottish Office 389–90w
Prison population, Scotland 648–50w
Prison sentences, Scotland 523w
Prisoners' release, Scotland 522–3w
Prisons, Scotland 522w
Property law, Scotland 231–2w
Public expenditure, Scotland 689w
Repossession orders, Scotland 158–60w
Road signs, Scotland 391w
Salmonella, Scotland 524w
Scottish Ambulance Service, Training 229–31w
Scottish health boards, Negligence 45–6w
Scottish Office, Ministers' visits abroad 455–6w
Sexual offences, Scotland 523w
Sleep 457–8w
Surgery, Scotland 44w
Theft, Scottish Office 456–7w
Young offenders, Scotland 523w

Dover, Mr Den
Questions
NHS finance, Scotland 896

Dowd, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order (05.03.97) 963–7, 992–3
Hospitals, Northern Ireland (05.03.97) 829–32
Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order (03.03.97) 662–4
Questions
Tipping of waste, Magheramorne 245w

Down and Newry
Local plans 240–1w

Driving tests
Eye disorders 50w

Drug abuse
Health education 705–6w
Prisoners 213–4w, 288w, 434–5w

Drug abuse resistance education programme
705w
Nottinghamshire (26.02.97) 397–410, 705w

Drug crimes
Prison visits 437–8w

Drug seizures
Prisons 438–9w

Drug side effects
Malaria 267w, 379–80w

Drugs
Licensing 658w
Road accidents 4w, 48–9w

Dual carriageways
270–1w

Duff, William
452–4w

Dumfries and Galloway
Armed forces training 109w

Dumfries and Galloway Health Board
Finance 646w

Dunblane School
(04.03.97) 714–67

Duncan, Mr Alan
Questions
Primary education, Rutland 25–6w

Duncan Smith, Mr Iain
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 344
Gulf war syndrome, Points of order (26.02.97) 341
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 158–9
Questions
Employment, EC countries 334

Dunn, Mr Bob
Questions
Grammar schools, Kent 336
Oil pollution, Pollution monitoring 246w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 447, (06.03.97) 1040
Electronic government (03.03.97) 630
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 155
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1069–70
Questions
Air safety 609–10w
Air traffic control, Scotland 549w
Assisted places scheme, Cheshire 555–6w
Channel tunnel, Fires 551w, 714–5w
Channel tunnel, Railway safety 714w
Class sizes, Cheshire 558w
Food hygiene 1013
Hospital waiting lists, Cheshire 570w
London and Continental Railways 551w
London Buses, Subsidies 550w
London Transport Museum 549w
London Underground, Advertising 548w
London Underground, Investment 548w
London Underground, Marketing 549w
London Underground, Privatisation 533w, 547–8w, 715w
London Underground, Rents 549w
Lorries, Axle weights 611–2w
National Bus Company, Privatisation 419w
National Lottery, Crewe 624w
Railfreight Distribution, Privatisation 419w, 713w
Railtrack, Debts written off 611w
Railway travel, Tickets 550w
Railway workers, Manpower 713w
Rescue services 610–1w
Rolling stock, Privatisation 418–9w
Social security claims, Cheshire 564w
Train operating units, Finance 419w
Weizman, Ezer 544w

Durant, Sir Anthony
Questions
Film industry 610
Millennium Commission, British Waterways Board 498w

Dykes, Mr Hugh
Questions
Grant maintained schools, Harrow 261w
Northern Ireland government 416
Retirement pensions 202w

Dyslexia
260w

Eagle, Ms Angela
Debates etc.
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Hormone treatments (24.02.97) 128–9
Questions
Hormone treatments, Civil proceedings 566w

Eagle, Ms Angela—continued
Legal aid, Hormone treatments 691w
Next steps initiative 123w

Ear disorders
War pensions 398w

Early retirement
Teachers 27w, 261w, 417–8w

Earnings rules
526–7w
Disability working allowance 88w
Handicap benefits 88w

East Midlands
Tourism 498w

East Sussex
Educational finance 259w
Teachers 264w

Easterhouse
Police stations 225w

Eastern Europe
Know-how Fund 13–4

Eastern region
Foreign investment in UK 413w

Eastham, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 941–4

EC action
Animal feed 321w
Antismoking campaign 565–6w
Noise (25.02.97) 247
Tipping of waste 459w

EC Committee of the Regions
Scotland 884–6

EC Cons Doc 11419/96
(25.02.97) 247

EC countries
Employment 333–5
Energy prices 168–70w
Income tax 135–6w
Pensions 88–9w
Prices 612–4w
Women's employment 16w

EC defence policy
France 589–90w
Germany 589–90w

EC enlargement
16–7

EC external relations
Israel (24.02.97) 122

EC external trade
248–50w
Burma 484w

EC Foreign Affairs Council
425–8w

EC grants and loans
584–5w
Blyth Valley 619w
Further education 337w
North East region 619w
Republic of Ireland 408w
Scotland 46–8w, 884–5

EC institutions
Information services 425w, 484w
Operating costs 484w

EC internal trade
481w

EC law
Armed forces 588–9w
Computer privacy 540w

EC law—continued
Food industry 743w
Oil industry 583–4w

EC social policy
542w

Economic and monetary union
490w
Departmental coordination 8–9
Fiscal policy 490w

Economic forecasting
Inflation 615w

Economic growth
147

Economic policy
Departmental coordination 3

Economic situation
709
Lichfield 156w
North Ayrshire 644w
Scotland 646w

Ecstasy
442–3w

Edinburgh Royal Infirmary
Hospital closures 522w
Medical research 457–8w

Education
Northern Ireland (03.03.97) 679

Education Act 1996
Questions
558w

Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 679

Education Reform Act 1988
Questions
558w

Education (Special Educational Needs) Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 595

Education vouchers
Cardiff 450w
Pre-school education 265–6w, 335–6, 414w, 450w, 899
Scotland 899

Educational assessment
Scotland 582–3w, 898–9

Educational finance
Birmingham 260w
Bristol 701–2
Buckinghamshire 553w
East Sussex 259w
Further education 149–50w
Lancashire 553w
Northern Ireland 417–8, 509–11w
Scotland 38–42w, 900

Educational policy
Scotland 899

Educational standards
425
General Certificate of Secondary Education 627–30w
Northern Ireland 417
Primary education 30w
Scotland 899

Efficiency scrutinies
Government Hospitality Fund 148w
Government research establishments 685w
Northern Ireland Dept of Economic Development 399w

Elderly
Local government social services 383–4w
Scotland (26.02.97) 277–96

Election administration
Welsh language 667w

Election offences
Absent voting 3w, 129–30w
Northern Ireland 99w

Electoral register
Northern Ireland 330w, 334–6w

Electorate
4–5w, 15w
Northern Ireland 95–6w, 245w, 664w
Scotland 231w

Electric cables
61w

Electricity interconnectors
Northern Ireland 331w

Electronic government
Ministerial statements (03.03.97) 625–36

Electronic tagging
Scotland 391w, 646w

Electronic warfare
Armed forces training 114w

Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969
Questions
729w

Employment
17–8w, 238w
EC countries 333–5
Lone parents 137w
Married women 137w
Scotland 644w

Employment agencies
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 165–6w
Dept of National Heritage 31–2w
Dept of Social Security 88w
Dept of the Environment 5–6w
Dept of Trade and Industry 408–11w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 321–2w
Ministry of Defence 105–6w

"Employment of Children Consultation Paper"
725w

Employment opportunities
260w, 262w
Foreign investment in UK 62–3w
Lone parents 262w

Employment policy
260w

Employment protection
Deregulation initiative 292w

Employment schemes
Lone parents 200w

Employment service local offices
Vacancies 469–70w

Empty housing
(25.02.97) 249–56

Enborne Lodge School Newbury
557–8w

Energy prices
EC countries 168–70w

English Heritage
Church buildings 499w

Entrust
728–9w

Environment Act 1995
Questions
219–20w

Environment and Heritage Service
see Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service

Environment protection
Crime 703
Dee estuary 277–8w
Genetically modified organisms 732w
Government grants 217–8w

Environmental audit
Attorney General 21–2w
Dept of Social Security 639w
Home Office 128w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 12w
Lord President of the Council 13–4w
Northern Ireland Office 99–100w
Treasury 136w

Environmental policy
Hydrocarbon oil duties 405–6w

Environmental Protection Act 1990
Questions
634–5w, 732w

Eskmeals
Firing ranges 251w, 370–1w

Essex
Council tax 595w

Estates renewal challenge fund
Manchester 297–8w

Etherington, Bill
Questions
Police, Recruitment 698w

Ethnic groups
Northern Ireland 100w
Prison population 213w

Europe
Rabies 573w

"European Challenge 1992"
481w

European Commission
Billing 619w

European communities
Information services 4–5
Publicity 56–7w

European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993
Debates etc.
Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 343–67

European Communities (Amendment) (No 2) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 596

European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an Association between the European Communities and their Member States and the State of Israel) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(24.02.97) 122

European Council
Cardiff 156w, 389w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 314w

European Court of Human Rights
Findlay, Alexander 485w
Legal opinion 319–20w

European Movement
1021

European Parliament Members
Labour costs 58w

***Evans, Mr Jonathan**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office*
Debates etc.
Wales (27.02.97) 472, 483, 499, 504, 506, 508, 510, 512, 518–24
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Wales 668w
Bron Dyffryn Special School 468w
Class sizes, Wales 726w
Council house sales, Wales 387w
Dee estuary, Environment protection 277–8w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 450w
General Certificate of Secondary Education, Wales 92w
Homelessness, Rural areas 726–7w
Power stations, Deeside 278w
Pre-school education, Cardiff 449w
Pupil exclusions, Clwyd 447w
Slaughterhouses, Inspections 674w
Welsh Office, Agricultural research 672–4w
Welsh Office, Veterinary services 674w

Evans, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 565–8
Prisons (Alcohol Testing) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 535–41, 548
Wales (27.02.97) 509
Questions
Administration of justice 624
Beef, Exports 1014
Child benefit, Sixth form education 200w
Deregulation initiative 123w
Local government expenditure 6–7w
Lorries, Axle weights 715–6w
National Lottery 617
NHS, North West region 67w
Northern Ireland Dept of Economic Development, Efficiency scrutinies 399w
Overseas aid 75w
Sinn Fein, Northern Ireland government 330w

***Evans, Mr Roger**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Social Security*
Debates etc.
Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill (HL), 2R and money res (25.02.97) 180, 191–4
Questions
Benefits Agency district offices, Camborne 532w
Carers, Social security benefits 86w
Cold weather payments, Wales 718w
Contracting Out (Functions of Local Authorities in Relation to Income-related Benefits) Order 1997 398w
Disability appeal tribunals 564–5w
Disability appeal tribunals, Newport Gwent 642w
Domestic energy consumption, VAT 560w
Earnings rules 526–7w
Environmental audit, Dept of Social Security 639w
Family credit, Child care 529w
Free school meals 281w
Habitual residence test 135–6, 396–8w
Hazardous materials, Dept of Social Security 527w
Housing benefits 87w, 281w, 641w
Housing benefits, Devon 528w

***Evans, Mr Roger**—continued*
Housing benefits, Government grants to local authorities 528–9w
Housing benefits, Mentally ill 641w
Housing benefits, Northamptonshire 87w
Housing benefits, Single people 200–1w
Housing benefits, Social security benefits rules 527w
Incapacity benefit 530w
Income support 281–3w
Income support, Capital rules 199–200w
Income support, Families 199w
Income support, Pensioners 562w
Income support, Social security benefits rules 563w
Income support, Social security recipients 199w
Jobseeker's allowance 563w, 641w
Jobseeker's allowance, National insurance contributions 313w
Jobseeker's allowance, Social security abuse 313w
Jobseeker's allowance, Social security appeals 718w
Social fund 285–6w, 563w, 640w
Social fund, Administrative costs 562w
Social Security appeal tribunals, Parliamentary questions 561w
Social Security appeal tribunals, Southwark 90w
Social security appeals 718w
Social security benefits 208w
Social security benefits, Political refugees 138–9
Social Security Benefits Agency, Contracts for services 529–30w, 561w
Social security benefits rules, Part-time education 279–80w
Social security claims 85–6w
Social security claims, Administrative costs 530–2w

Evidence
Criminal proceedings 291–2w

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Questions
Domestic energy consumption, Scotland 635w
Fishing quotas 1015
Hospices, Scotland 891
Oral questions 540–1w
Science and technology research, Government grants 479w, 581w

Excise duties
Motor vehicles 406w

Executives
Health authorities 736–7w

Exhaust emission controls
Petrol alternatives 53w

Export of live animals
76–8w, 327w
Cattle 1012–3
Kent 747–8w
Pigs 329w
Sheep 748w

Exports
Beef 745w, 1010–6
Wood 620w

Exservicemen
Nuclear weapons tests 402–3w, 717–8w

External financing limits
British Railways Board 715w
British Waterways Board 220w

Extradition
McAliskey, Roisin 132–3w, 147–8w, 214w, 290w, 430w

Eye disorders
Driving tests 50w

Eye tests
514w

Faber, Mr David
Questions
Copyright, Video recordings 585w
EC grants and loans 584–5w

Fabricant, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 439
Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 553–5, 558, 568–70
Electronic government (03.03.97) 635–6
Information technology, Points of order (03.03.97) 636
NHS (24.02.97) 23
Prisons (Alcohol Testing) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 530–2, 534, 536, 540, 544–9
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1064, 1068
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1032–3
Questions
Assisted places scheme 261w
Church Commissioners, Finance 19
Civil servants, Career structure 2
Economic situation, Lichfield 156w
Food industry, Chocolate 744w
Government Hospitality Fund, Efficiency scrutinies 148w
Income support 283–4w
Legal aid, Per capita costs 621–2
Pig diseases, Germany 747w
Pigmeat, Health hazards 738w
Pop stars 619
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits uprating 135
Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, Parliamentary questions 1016

Factor VIII
Haemophilia 659w

Fallon Inquiry
see Ashworth Hospital Inquiry 1997

Families
Income support 199w

Family benefits
131–3

Family credit
Child care 529w
Maintenance 530w

Family Law Advisory Board
506–7w

Family planning
Overseas aid 542w

Farm and countryside enhancement scheme
Northern Ireland 95w

Farm Woodland (Amendment) Scheme 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 679

Farm Woodland Premium Scheme 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 679

Farms
Scotland 37w

Fatchett, Mr Derek
Questions
Burma, EC external trade 484w
Iran, Overseas trade 484w

Faulds, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 32

Faulds, Mr Andrew—continued
Questions
Hong Kong Legislative Council 146–7w

Fences
Railway safety 551–2w, 716–7w

Fenner, Dame Peggy
Debates etc.
Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (03.03.97) 654–5

Festivals and special occasions
Scotland 888

Fibromyalgia
566w

Field, Mr Barry
Questions
Age, Dept of Health 67w
Age, Dept of Social Security 280–1w
Age, Dept of Trade and Industry 479w
Age, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 55w
Age, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 77–8w
Age, Ministry of Defence 488w
Age, Scottish Office 521w
Age, Treasury 134–5w
Age, Welsh Office 274w

Field, Mr Frank
Questions
Youth unemployment 14w

Film industry
609–10

Finance Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (06.03.97) 1125
Questions
658w

Findlay, Alexander
European Court of Human Rights 485w

Fine defaulters
Television licences 695w

Fire prevention
219w

Fire Service College
Government grants 700–1w

Firearms
Smuggling 535–6w

Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475
Questions
Compensation 290–1w, 697w

Firearms certificates
Greater London 3w

Fires
Channel tunnel 551w, 714–5w

Fireworks
Safety standards 7

Firing ranges
Armed forces training 111w
Eskmeals 251w, 370–1w
Kirkcudbright 111w
Schools 122w, 487w
Shoeburyness 251w

First aid
Curriculum 556w

Fiscal policy
Economic and monetary union 490w

Fish conservation
743w, 745w, 1011–2
Lobsters 1006–7
White fish 571w

Fisheries
1015–6
North East region 323w

Fishing
611–2

Fishing quotas
1006, 1012, 1015
North Sea 743w

Flood control
River Tay 645–6w
Scotland 645w

Flynn, Paul
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 441–2
Business questions (27.02.97) 452–3, (06.03.97) 1042
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 163
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1034–5
Wales (27.02.97) 458, 461
Questions
Animal diseases, Compensation 78w, 682–4w
Armed forces casualties 591–2w
Bovine somatotropin 513w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 570–1w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Animal feed 80w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Wales 668w
Clergy, Pensions 65w
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Public appointments 517–9w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 73w
Deregulation initiative, Leisure 7
Disability appeal tribunals 564–5w
Disability appeal tribunals, Newport Gwent 642w
Drugs, Licensing 658w
EC social policy 542w
Fowl pest, Northern Ireland 101w, 659w, 722–3w
General Certificate of Secondary Education 149w
General Certificate of Secondary Education, Wales 92w
Genetically modified organisms, Import controls 79w, 513w
Medical treatments, Children 658w
Meningitis, Gwynedd 387–8w
Overdoses 73w, 738w
Overseas aid, Family planning 542w
Pameton 738w
Parliamentary questions, Costs 392w
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits uprating 133–4
Roll-on roll-off ships, Shipping safety 609w, 714w
Smuggling, Firearms 535–6w
Social Security appeal tribunals, Parliamentary questions 561w
Social security appeals 718w

Food
744w

Food hygiene
681w, 1013
Charities 79–80w
Slaughterhouses 1018–20

Food imports
743w

Food industry
Chocolate 744w
EC law 743w
Safety standards 194–5w

Food inspection
Northern Ireland 660–1w
Scotland 652w
Wales 674w

Food labelling
1007
Animal feed 80w

Food microbiology
Safety standards 196–7w

Food poisoning
307–8w, 384–5w
Scotland 523–4w

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Age 55w
Billing 702w
Civil service agencies 56w
Contracts for services 420–2w
European Council 314w
Millennium Club 59w
Parliamentary questions 222–3w
Private finance initiative 703w
Theft 56w
UN Conference on Environment and Development 618w

Foreign companies in UK
Industrial research 61–2w

Foreign investment in UK
Eastern region 413w
Employment opportunities 62–3w
St Asaph Business Park 726w
West Midlands 62–3w

Foreign spouses
Immigration applications 58w, 314–5w

Foreign trade
South Africa 393w

Forest Healthcare NHS Trust
442w

Forest protection
Latin America 13

Forman, Mr Nigel
Questions
European Council, Cardiff 156w
Retirement pensions 202w

Former ministers
Redundancy pay 11

***Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael**, Secretary of State for Scotland*
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 716, 726–30
Questions
Child abuse, Scotland 451–2w
Devolution, Scotland 888–9
EC Committee of the Regions, Scotland 884–6
EC grants and loans, Scotland 884–5
Further education, Scotland 689w
Hunterston B, Radiation hazards 903–9
Income tax, Scotland 646w
Local government expenditure, Scotland 645w
Mentally disadvantaged, Scotland 45w
MV Braer, Oil pollution 231w
Nuclear power, Scotland 909–10
Paedophilia, Scotland 450–1w
Scottish Grand Committee 643w
Scottish Grand Committee, Scottish Office 35w
Scottish Office, Publicity 163–5w

***Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael**—continued*
Taxation, Scotland 892–4
Torness power station 909–10

***Forth, Mr Eric**, Minister of State, Dept for Education and Employment*
Questions
Employment opportunities 260w, 262w
Employment service local offices, Vacancies 469–70w
Graduates, Take-up of employment 628w
Grammar schools 259–60w
Grant maintained schools, Performance standards 258w
Hard core unemployed 559w
Higher education, Physics 557w
Higher education admission, Leeds 625w
Home-school partnership agreements 559w
Jobmatch scheme 265w
Jobseeker's allowance 258w, 337–8w, 470–1w, 632–3w
Jobseeker's allowance, Availability for work 258w
Jobseeker's allowance, Disabled workers 471w
Jobseeker's allowance, Part-time employment 258–9w
Jobseeker's allowance, Rural areas 262w
Medical students 630–1w, 704–5w
Pupil exclusions 263w
Religious education 329–30
School discipline 261w, 325–7
Student loans 626–7w
Student Loans Company, Privatisation 627w
Student numbers 470w, 630w
Teacher training, Shortage subjects 556–7w
Teachers, Lost working days 29–30w
Teachers, Staffordshire 263–4w
Temporary employment 331–3
Unemployment 262w

Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 626–7
Questions
Public appointments 4

Foster, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Road Traffic Reduction Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 575–8
Questions
Local education authorities, Administrative costs 325

Foulkes, Mr George
Debates etc.
Scottish Legal Service Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill, Report and 3R (26.02.97) 373–6
Questions
Air force, Armed forces training 486w
Air traffic control, North Sea 545w
Apache AH-64 helicopter 108w
Armed forces civilians 486w
Armed forces training 108w, 112w, 116w
Armed forces training, Dumfries and Galloway 109w
Armed forces training, Goose Bay 112w, 637–8w
Armed forces training, Helicopters 111w, 116w
Armed forces training, Kielder forest 115w
Armed forces training, Stranraer 112–3w
Arms control negotiations, Mines 12
Army, Armed forces deployment 709w
Army, Public relations 487w
Defence land 109–11w

***Foulkes, Mr George**—continued*
Electricity interconnectors, Northern Ireland 331w
Electronic warfare, Armed forces training 114w
Firing ranges, Armed forces training 111w
Firing ranges, Kirkcudbright 111w
Incapacity benefit 201w
Low flying, Military aircraft 107–8w
Low flying, Night flying 107–8w
Military aircraft 112w
Military aircraft, Air accidents 114–5w, 485w
Military aircraft, Air safety 487w
Military aircraft, Aircrew 254w
Military vehicles, Parachuting 486w
Nimrod aircraft, Aircrew 114w
Pipeline inspection notification system 585–6w
RAF Spadeadam, Armed forces training 113–4w, 116w
RAF Spadeadam, Defence equipment 114w
Rangeless airborne instrumented debriefing system 115w
Scottish health boards, Negligence 45–6w
Sea Harrier aircraft, Aircrew 254w
Tornado aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 113w, 115–6w

Foundation for the Built Environment
8w

Fowl pest
Northern Ireland 101w, 659w, 722–3w

***Fox, Dr Liam**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
Aid financed trade 467–8w
Arms control negotiations, Mines 11–2
Brazil, Overseas aid 13
Bulgaria, Know-how Fund 14
Development aid 150–1w
Eastern Europe, Know-how Fund 13–4
EC enlargement 16–7
EC social policy 542w
Foreign spouses, Immigration applications 58w, 314–5w
India, Overseas aid 15
Indonesia, Police training 75–6w
International Development Association 543–4w
International Fund for Agricultural Development, UK contributions 302w
Iraq, Overseas aid 75w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Compensation 701–2w
Ivory Coast, Human rights 468w
Latin America, Overseas aid 13
Overseas aid 14–6, 75w, 151w, 301–2w
Overseas aid, Agricultural production 542–3w
Overseas aid, Contracts 541–2w
Overseas aid, Family planning 542w
Romania, Know-how Fund 14
Rwanda, Disaster relief 75w
South Africa, Foreign trade 393w
South Africa, Overseas aid 393w
Sri Lanka, Diplomatic service 55w
UN Conference on Environment and Development 55w
UN Conference on Environment and Development, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 618w

France
EC defence policy 589–90w

Fraser, Mr John
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 437

***Fraser, Mr John**—continued*
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 159–60
Questions
Council housing finance 700
Immigration and Nationality Division, Performance standards 432–3w
Sports centres, Crystal Palace 32w

Fraud
Child Support Agency 198w
Government departments 138w
Legal aid 620–1
Prescriptions 91–2w, 388w, 447w, 449w
Road tax 546–7w

Free school meals
281w

***Freeman, Rt Hon Roger**, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster*
Debates etc.
Electronic government, Ministerial statements (03.03.97) 625–36
Questions
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 18
Central Office of Information, Labour costs 125–6w
Civil servants, Career structure 1–2
Civil servants, London allowance 287–8w
Civil servants, Pay 125w
Deregulation initiative 123w, 166–7w
Deregulation initiative, Animal feed 6–7
Deregulation initiative, Leisure 7
Deregulation initiative, Licensing laws 7–8
Deregulation initiative, Rural areas 122w
Deregulation initiative, Small businesses 5–7
Government contracts, Retail prices index 222w
Millennium Exhibition 497w
Millennium Exhibition, Finance 123w
Millennium Exhibition, Water transport 124w
Ministerial Committee on Coordination and Presentaion of Government Policy 3–4
Parliamentary questions, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 618w
Prince's Trust, Civil servants 222w
Public appointments 4, 124–5w

Freemasonry
Non-departmental public bodies 725w
Wales 725w

Freight facilities grant
296w

French, Mr Douglas
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1071, 1073
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 190w
Museums and galleries, Capital investment 497–8w

Further education
EC grants and loans 337w
Educational finance 149–50w
Scotland 582w, 689w

"Further Education in Scotland Annual Report, 1996"
689w

Fyfe, Maria
Debates etc
Elderly, Scotland (26.02.97) 290–1
Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (26.02.97) 388
Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 777, 785–7

***Fyfe, Maria**—continued*
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 716, 721, 738–9, 761
Questions
Dental services, Scotland 454–5w
Duff, William 452–4w
NHS finance, Scotland 896
Nutrition and health, Scotland 649–52w, 689w
Teachers, Scotland 645w
Voluntary organisations, Glasgow 581w
Voluntary organisations, Scotland 581w

Gaelic language
Northern Ireland 100–1w
Schools 100w

Galbraith, Mr Sam
Questions
Coroners 606w
Hunterston B, Radiation hazards 908–9
Salmon, Scotland 895

Gale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Leader of the Opposition, Points of order (25.02.97) 164–5
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 164–5

Gallie, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 770, 775–8, 780
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 726, 737–8, 741, 749–52
Questions
Council tax, Scotland 887
Electronic tagging, Scotland 646w
Fisheries 1015–6
Further education, Scotland 689w
Hunterston B, Radiation hazards 907
Leasehold housing, Scotland 232w
Property law, Scotland 231–2w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 330w

Galloway, Mr George
Questions
Unemployment, Scotland 643w

Gaming clubs
Croydon 538w

Gapes, Mr Mike
Questions
NATO 712w
Nazi war crimes, Prosecutions 392w
Social security benefits, Expenditure 86w

Gardiner, Sir George
Questions
Hospitals 268–9w

Garnier, Mr Edward
Questions
Job security 320
Local government expenditure 694
Salmon, Scotland 894–5

Garrett, Mr John
Debates etc.
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1028
Questions
Dual carriageways 270–1w

Gastroschisis
74w, 238–9w
Wales 672w

GCE A Level
Science education 630w

General Certificate of Secondary Education
149w

***General Certificate of Secondary Education**—continued*
Educational standards 627–30w
Wales 92w

General elections
709–10

General practitioners
383w
Wales 388–90w

Genetic engineering
Patents 481w

Genetically modified organisms
Environment protection 732w
Import controls 79w, 513w
Industrial health and safety 732w

Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992
Questions
732w

Genetics
Cancer hazards 731w
Insurance 293–4w

George, Mr Bruce
Questions
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Privatisation 712w
Military Provost Guard Service 709w

German measles
Congenital abnormalities 520w

Germany
Armed forces 590w
EC defence policy 589–90w
Pig diseases 747w
Refugees 223w
Unemployment 333

Gerrard, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
Political refugees (05.03.97) 848–50, 853
Questions
Forest Healthcare NHS Trust 442w
Gulf war syndrome 423
Pre-school education, Waltham Forest 626w
Public sector housing, Waltham Forest 728w
Single regeneration budget, Waltham Forest 598–9w
Waltham Forest Housing Action Trust 599w

Gill, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 346
NATO (26.02.97) 268–70
Political refugees (05.03.97) 842
Questions
Beef, Imports 76w

***Gillan, Mrs Cheryl**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment*
Debates etc.
Drug abuse resistance education programme, Nottinghamshire (26.02.97) 403–10
Questions
Assisted places scheme 29w, 261w, 321–2
Assisted places scheme, Cheshire 555–6w
Assisted places scheme, Lancashire 555w
Bradfield House School Cullompton 414–5w
Curriculum 28w
Drug abuse resistance education programme 705w

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl—continued
Drug abuse resistance education programme, Nottinghamshire 705w
Dyslexia 260w
Education Reform Act 1988 558w
Educational finance, Birmingham 260w
Employment opportunities, Lone parents 262w
Enborne Lodge School Newbury 557–8w
First aid, Curriculum 556w
General Certificate of Secondary Education 149w
Grant maintained schools, Bournemouth 327
Grant maintained schools, Cheshire 322–3
Grant maintained schools, Harrow 261w
Health education, Drug abuse 705–6w
Languages education, Primary education 266w
Local education authorities, Cost per pupil 627–30w
Older workers 559w
Primary education, Educational standards 30w
School buildings, Building repairs 260w
School transport 260w
Science education, GCE A Level 630w
Special schools, Greater London 265w
Teachers, Child abuse 26–7w
Teachers, Early retirement 27w, 261w, 417–8w
Teachers, East Sussex 264w
Teachers' pensions 27–8w
Training and work experience scheme, St Helena 413w

Glamorgan
Local government reform 533w

Glan Clwyd Hospital
Cancer 276w

Glasgow
Public expenditure 901–2
Voluntary organisations 581w

Glaucoma
444–6w

Glenfeshie Estate
Management agreements 687w

Godman, Mr Norman A
Debates etc.
Elderly, Scotland (26.02.97) 277–81, 286
Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (26.02.97) 380, 383–5, 388, 395
Hospitals, Northern Ireland (05.03.97) 835
Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 769, 777
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 719–20
National Heritage Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 199, 205, 211
Oral question time intervention (06.03.97) 1006
Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Bill (HL), Points of order (25.02.97) 196
Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Bill (HL), Rem stages (25.02.97) 196
Political refugees (05.03.97) 840, 844
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 925
Scottish Legal Service Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill, Report and 3R (26.02.97) 370, 372–5, 378

Godman, Mr Norman A—continued
Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill (HL), 2R and money res (25.02.97) 173, 180–3, 194
Questions
Common fisheries policy 1011–2
Lockerbie, Bombings 883–4
Prisoners, Health 289–90w
Scottish Office, Ministers' visits abroad 455–6w
Youth unemployment, Northern Ireland 423

Goktepe, Metin
Homicide 424w

Gold and foreign exchange reserves
Hong Kong 483w

Golding, Mrs Llin
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (06.03.97) 1018
Sex Offenders Bill, Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 224
Questions
Common agricultural policy 1009

Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Questions
Dyslexia 260w
Local government functions 122w

Goose Bay
Armed forces training 112w, 637–8w

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Debates etc.
Political refugees (05.03.97) 837–41, 843, 858
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1027

Government assistance to industry
Airbuses 619–20w
South Wales 275–6w
West Midlands 171–2w, 174–6w

Government buildings
Riyadh 404w

Government contracts
Retail prices index 222w

Government departments
Billing 139w
Fraud 138w
Industrial research 621w

Government grants to local authorities
Housing benefits 528–9w
Scottish Borders Council (04.03.97) 807
Wolverhampton 218–20w

Government grants to voluntary organisations
393–5w

Government Hospitality Fund
Efficiency scrutinies 148w

Government information services
Ministerial statements (03.03.97) 625–36

Government offices for the regions
Civil service manpower 292–3w
Dept of Trade and Industry 292–3w

Government research establishments
Crowthorne 551w
Efficiency scrutinies 685w
Privatisation 621–2w

GP fundholders
74w
Wales 93–4w

Graduates
Take-up of employment 628w

Graham, Mr Thomas
Debates etc.
Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (26.02.97) 382–3
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 745, 749
Scottish Legal Service Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill, Report and 3R (26.02.97) 375

Grammar schools
259–60w
Kent 336

Grant, Sir Anthony
Questions
Prices 18–9w

Grant maintained schools
Bournemouth 327
Cheshire 322–3
Harrow 261w
Performance standards 258w

Grazing land
Wales 91w

Great Apes (Prohibition of Experiments) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
1R (25.02.97) 165
2R order read (28.02.97) 596

Greater London
Accident and emergency departments 520w
Bus crews 502w
Council housing 466w
Firearms certificates 3w
Housing associations 466w
NHS finance 741–2w
Prisons 438–9w
Special schools 265w

Greenhouse effect
594w

Greenway, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 160–1
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1032
Questions
Animal welfare 746w
Arms control negotiations, Mines 12
Bishops 65w
British Academy of Sport 34w
Child benefit, Data banks 143
Deregulation initiative 123w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 265–6w
Educational finance, Northern Ireland 417
Home-school partnership agreements 559w
Law centres 507w
Life insurance, Taxation 139w
Noise 601w
Official engagements 156w, 320w, 545w, 706w
Public expenditure, Scotland 689w
Retirement pensions 202w
Sportsgrounds, Wembley 500w
Three Valleys Water Services, Cryptosporidia 732–3w
VAT, Building repairs 405w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 438
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1028
Questions
Lobsters, Fish conservation 1006–7

Greenway, Mr John—continued
Standard spending assessments, Rural areas 703
Tourism, Training 500w

Griffiths, Mr Peter
Questions
Income tax, EC countries 135–6w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Debates etc.
Wales (27.02.97) 468–75, 487
Questions
Class sizes, Wales 726w

Grocott, Mr Bruce
Questions
Job security 319
Ministerial Committee on Coordination and Presentaion of Government Policy 3
"Privatisation: Setting Enterprise Free" 479–80w
Television programmes 499w

Grylls, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 160

Gulf war syndrome
423, 425–7, 545w
Compensation 253w
Organophosphorous pesticides 252–3w, 587–8w, 709–10w
Research 185–6w

***Gummer, Rt Hon John**, Secretary of State for the Environment*
Questions
Biodiversity 466w
Coke, Air pollution 152w
Compost 597w
Council tax, Multiple occupation 299w
Environment protection, Crime 703
Greenhouse effect 594w
Local government expenditure 693–4
Noise 734w
Organophosphorous pesticides, Research 154w
Radioactive wastes, Research 466w
Ringway Parliamentary Support Group 734w
Sellafield, Radioactive waste disposal 461w
Sellafield, Rock characterisation facility 464–5w, 728w
"This Common Inheritance Sixth Year Report" 633w
Three Valleys Water Services, Cryptosporidia 732–3w
Town and country planning, Sustainable development 9–12w
UN Conference on Environment and Development 595w, 695–6
UN Environment Programme 152–3w
Water pollution, Prosecutions 153–4w

Gunnell, Mr John
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 440
Business questions (27.02.97) 452, (06.03.97) 1044–5
NHS (24.02.97) 27, 102–4
Questions
Deputy Prime Minister, Ministerial policy advisors 124w
Grant maintained schools, Bournemouth 327
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 312–3w
Maintenance, Children 198w
Opencast mining, Planning appeals 700–1

Gwynedd
Meningitis 387–8w

Habanako, Y
179w

Habitual residence test
135–6, 396–8w

Haemophilia
Factor VIII 659w

***Hague, Rt Hon William**, Secretary of State for Wales*
Debates etc.
Wales (27.02.97) 457–68, 470–1, 474
Questions
Age, Welsh Office 274w
Antibiotics, Prescriptions 92w
Billing, Welsh Office 726w
Bryn-Y-Neuadd Hospital 276–7w
Cancer, Medical treatments 276w
Civil service agencies, Welsh Office 276w
Community hospitals, Wales 275w
Disability living allowance, Wales 275w
Election administration, Welsh language 667w
European Council, Cardiff 389w
Freemasonry, Non-departmental public bodies 725w
General practitioners, Wales 388–90w
Government assistance to industry, South Wales 275–6w
Grazing land, Wales 91w
Health authorities, Finance 727w
High technology, Wales 447–8w
Housing for Wales, Loans 727–8w
Influenza, Vaccination 388w
Listed buildings, Wales 671–2w
Local government finance, Wales 724w
NHS finance, Wales 277w
NHS trusts, Private finance initiative 449–50w
Parliamentary questions, Welsh Office 276w
Prescriptions, Fraud 91–2w, 388w, 449w
Public expenditure, Wales 386w
St Asaph Business Park, Foreign investment in UK 726w
Tax yields, Wales 274–5w, 387w
Theft, Welsh Office 277w
Wheelchairs, Wales 275w

Hain, Mr Peter
Questions
African National Congress, Bombings 128–9w
Temporary employment 332–3
Vitamin B6 567w, 680–1w

Hall, Mr Mike
Questions
Employment agencies, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 165–6w
Employment agencies, Dept of National Heritage 31–2w
Employment agencies, Dept of Social Security 88w
Employment agencies, Dept of the Environment 5–6w
Employment agencies, Dept of Trade and Industry 408–11w
Employment agencies, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 321–2w
Employment agencies, Ministry of Defence 105–6w
Freight facilities grant 296w
National Lottery 272–3w

Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1083–7

Hamilton, Mr Neil
Questions
Ringway Parliamentary Support Group 734w

Hampson, Dr Keith
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1059
Questions
European communities, Information services 5
Higher education admission, Leeds 625w
Pre-school education, Age participation rates 414w

Handicap benefits
Earnings rules 88w
Social security recipients 639–40w

Handicapped
Discrimination 141–2
Parents 443–4w

***Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
Libyan Arab Republic, Sanctions (28.02.97) 600, 602–6
Questions
Age, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 55w
Billing, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 702w
Civil service agencies, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 56w
Contracts for services, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 420–2w
Diplomatic service 422–4w
Hong Kong, Gold and foreign exchange reserves 483w
Hong Kong Government, Private education 314w
Hong Kong Legislative Council 146–7w
Immigration controls 223w
Indonesia, Human rights 56w
Iran, Overseas trade 484w
Millennium Club, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 59w
Private finance initiative, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 703w
Qatar, Ministers' visits abroad 57–8w
Russia, Seals 425w
Theft, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 56w
Weizman, Ezer 544w

Hard core unemployed
559w
Northern Ireland 329–30w

Hardy, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Hedges and ditches (26.02.97) 303–10
Questions
Church buildings, Cultural heritage 64w
Office for Standards in Education 706w

Hargreaves, Mr Andrew
Questions
Religious education 329–30

Harman, Ms Harriet
Debates etc.
Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill (HL), 2R and money res (25.02.97) 174–7
Questions
Family benefits 132–3
Social security claims, Administrative costs 530–2w

Harrogate
Armed forces training 638w

Harrow
Grant maintained schools 261w

Harvey, Mr Nick
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Devon 399w
Companies House 170–1w
Housing benefits, Devon 528w
International Labour Organisation 30w
Tugboats 53–4w

Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Questions
Class sizes, Primary education 328–9
Sports, Young people 608–9

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Questions
Assisted places scheme 321–2
Legal aid scheme 622

Hawksley, Mr Warren
Questions
Salmon, Scotland 894–5

Hazardous materials
Attorney General 22w
Dept of Social Security 527w
Dept of the Environment 216–7w
Devonport Dockyard 257w, 586w
Home Office 128w
House of Commons Commission 20w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 12–3w
Lord President of the Council 14w
Northern Ireland Office 239–40w
Rosyth Dockyard 257w, 586w
Scotland (25.02.97) 197
Treasury 136w

Head lice
Health education 736w

***Heald, Mr Oliver**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Social Security*
Debates etc.
Vincent, Reg, Pensions (26.02.97) 315–8
Questions
Child benefit, Data banks 142–3
Home responsibilities protection 526w
Housing benefits, Social security abuse 527–8w
National insurance contributions 201–2w, 308–9w
National insurance contributions, Wales 309w
Nuclear weapons tests, Exservicemen 717–8w
Pensioners, Personal income 201w, 284–6w, 525–6w
Pensioners, Standard of living 311–2w
Pensions 89–90w, 719w
Pensions, EC countries 88–9w
Personal pensions 201w
Retirement pensions 202–3w, 564w
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits uprating 133–4
Retirement pensions, Wales 720w
State earnings related pension scheme 90w, 208–9w, 642w
War pensions, Iraq-Kuwait conflict 719w

Health
Prisoners 289–90w

Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981
Questions
Schools 600–1w

Health authorities
Executives 736–7w
Finance 446–7w, 727w
Wales 727w

Health education
Drug abuse 705–6w
Head lice 736w
Meningitis 181–2w

Health hazards
Pigmeat 738w

Health physics
Compensation 121–2w

Health service staff
Industrial health and safety 708
Lost working days 73w
Pay 736w
Scotland 35w
Women 441w

Health services
Scotland 646w

Heath, Edward
144, 146

Hedges and ditches
(26.02.97) 303–10, 602w, 729–30w
Nature conservation 744w

Helicopters
Armed forces training 111w, 116w

Henderson, Mr Doug
Debates etc.
Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 570–1
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 924
Prisons (Alcohol Testing) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 540–3
Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order (03.03.97) 659–61

Hendron, Dr Joe
Questions
Election offences, Northern Ireland 99w
Electoral register, Northern Ireland 334–6w
Incapacity benefit, Northern Ireland 97–9w
Northern Ireland government 415
Public sector housing, Belfast 184w

Hendry, Mr Charles
Questions
Council of Ministers 315–9w
Prince's Trust, Civil servants 222w

Heppell, Mr John
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 33, 41, 43, 51–2
Questions
Standard spending assessments 704–5

Hereditary diseases
739w

Heseltine, Michael
710

***Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael**, First Secretary of State and Deputy Prime Minister*
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1047–56, 1066, 1069, 1072
Questions
Departmental coordination 124w
Departmental responsibilities, Local government 122w
Deputy Prime Minister, Ministerial policy advisors 124w
European communities, Information services 4–5
Local government functions 122w
Regional electricity companies, Ownership 10–1

***Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael**—continued*
Trade competitiveness, Manufacturing industries 9–10

Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Questions
Astra Holdings, Pension funds 30–1w
National Audit Office 81w
Sports centres, Crystal Palace 32w
UK contributions to EC budget 17–8

High technology
Wales 447–8w

Higher education
Physics 557w

Higher education admission
Leeds 625w

Highlands of Scotland
Local government expenditure 645w

Highways Agency
Performance standards 297w

Hill, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 159

Hill farming
Agricultural subsidies 741–2w

Hillingdon
Housing associations 698

Hillsborough Stadium Inquiry
603w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Debates etc.
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Hormone treatments (24.02.97) 123–6, 128
Hood, Wayne, Prisoners (05.03.97) 859–62
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 674w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Blood transfusion services 517w
Limitation of actions 506w
Litter 594w
Pinderfields Hospital NHS Trust 519w

Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England
see English Heritage

HM Chief Inspector of Schools
see Office for Standards in Education

Hodge, Ms Margaret
Debates etc.
Adoptive Mothers (Maternity Leave) Bill 1996/97, Public petitions (28.02.97) 525
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 161–2
Questions
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 266w
Standard spending assessments 701

Hoey, Miss Kate
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 161
Questions
Airport tax, Northern Ireland 329w
Sports centres, Crystal Palace 608

***Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas**, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
Debates etc.
Slaughterhouses, Ministerial statements (06.03.97) 1023–35
Questions
Agricultural research 324–6w, 674–80w
Beef, Exports 745w, 1010–5
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1010

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas—continued
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Animal feed 1011
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 190w, 1013–4
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 746w
Central Veterinary Laboratory, Scientists 684–5w
Common agricultural policy 1009–10
Food hygiene 1013
Government research establishments, Efficiency scrutinies 685w
Import of live animals, Smuggling 190w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Cash limits 278w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Veterinary services 685–6w
Scottish Grand Committee, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 80w
Slaughterhouses, Inspections 679–80w
State Veterinary Service, Manpower 323–4w
Veterinary investigation centres 324w

Hogg, Mr Norman
Debates etc.
Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (26.02.97) 381–2
M80 (05.03.97) 875–7
Scottish Legal Service Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill, Report and 3R (26.02.97) 371–3
Questions
Revenue support grant, Scotland 644w

Holocaust Denial Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* (28.02.97) 594

Home energy efficiency scheme
154–5w, 221–2w, 730w

Home Office
Billing 700w
Civil service agencies 433w
Contracts for services 536–7w
Environmental audit 128w
Hazardous materials 128w
Parliamentary questions 432w
Private finance initiative 699w
Scottish Grand Committee 127w
Theft 433w

Home responsibilities protection
526w

Home Robertson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill (HL), 2R and money res (25.02.97) 188–9
Questions
Devolution, Scotland 146–7, 888
Torness power station 909–10

Homelessness
Rural areas 688w, 726–7w, 733w
Scotland 232–3w, 688w
Wales 726–7w

Home-school partnership agreements
559w

Homicide
Goktepe, Metin 424w
Prison sentences 697–8w
Sentencing 698w

Hong Kong
(28.02.97) 594
Gold and foreign exchange reserves 483w

Hong Kong—continued
Ministers' visits abroad 314w, 483w, 487–8w

Hong Kong Government
Private education 314w

Hong Kong Legislative Council
146–7w

Hood, Wayne
Prisoners (05.03.97) 859–66

Horam, Mr John, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health
Debates etc.
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Hormone treatments (24.02.97) 127–30
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Crimes of violence 71w
Accident and emergency departments, Private hospitals 657w
Acute beds 656w
Age, Dept of Health 67w
Ambulance services 442w
Antismoking campaign, EC action 565–6w
Baby milks 735–6w
Billing, Dept of Health 740–1w
Blood 570w
Breast cancer, Screening 657w
Breasts, Plastic surgery 70w
Buckinghamshire Health Authority, Finance 446w
Cancer, Hospital patients 657w
Cerebrovascular diseases 71–2w, 269w
Civil service agencies, Dept of Health 180w
Community Hygiene Concern, Government grants 736w
Contracts for services, Dept of Health 380–2w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 73w, 442w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Blood donors 382w, 517w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Blood transfusion services 517w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Hormone treatments 183w, 568w
Cryptosporidia, Water supply 657w, 737–8w
Fibromyalgia 566w
Food microbiology, Safety standards 196–7w
Food poisoning 384–5w
Forest Healthcare NHS Trust 442w
Gastroschisis 74w
German measles, Congenital abnormalities 520w
Glaucoma 445–6w
Haemophilia, Factor VIII 659w
Health authorities, Finance 446–7w
Hereditary diseases 739w
Hormone treatments 183w
Hormone treatments, Civil proceedings 566w
Hospital admissions 69w, 656w
Hospital consultants, Private patients 69w
Hospital patients, Weather 440–1w
Hospital waiting lists 71w, 268w, 379–80w
Hospital waiting lists, Cheshire 570w
Hospitals 268–9w
Hospitals, Public telephones 74w
Influenza, Vaccination 73–4w, 382–3w
Medical treatments, Weather 440–1w
Meningitis 182w
Meningitis, Health education 181–2w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 739–40w
Mothers, Welfare foods 519–20w
NHS, Audit 267–8w

Horam, Mr John—continued
NHS, Building repairs 519w
NHS, North West region 67w
NHS Executive, Finance 69–70w
NHS finance 519w
NHS trusts, Private finance initiative 569w
Nurses 183w
Nurses' training, Student numbers 441w
Nurses' training, Student wastage 445w
Patients' transport 383w
Pay beds 68–9w
Pigmeat, Health hazards 738w
Pinderfields Hospital NHS Trust 519w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Health 740w
Prosthetics 739w
Rabies 569w
Surgery, Hospital admissions 445w, 519w, 656–7w
Surgery, Hospital waiting lists 658w
Theft, Dept of Health 268w
Vaccination, Travel requirements 67–8w
Vitamin B6 567w

Hormone treatments
183w
Civil proceedings 566w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia (24.02.97) 123–30, 183w, 568w
Legal aid 691w
Scotland 234w

Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475

Hospices
Scotland 891

Hospital admissions
69w, 656w
Surgery 445w, 519w, 656–7w

Hospital beds
Scotland 37–8w

Hospital closures
Edinburgh Royal Infirmary 522w

Hospital consultants
Private patients' 69w
Vacancies 267w, 514–6w

Hospital patients
Cancer 657w
Northern Ireland 508–10w
Scotland 229–30w
Wales 665–6w
Weather 229–30w, 440–1w, 508–10w

Hospital waiting lists
71w, 268w, 379–80w
Cheshire 570w
Surgery 658w

Hospitals
268–9w
Armed forces medical services 385–6w
Manchester 1020–1
Northern Ireland (05.03.97) 817–36
Public telephones 74w

House of Commons Commission
Hazardous materials 20w

House of Commons Committees of the Whole House
708

House of Commons divisions
Speaker's rulings and statements (28.02.97) 527

House of Commons questions
Scotland 20–1w

House of Commons Refreshment Dept
see Refreshment Dept

House purchase
Armed forces housing 404w

Housing
1022
Northern Ireland 580w

Housing and handicapped
698
Building regulations 601–2w

Housing associations
Greater London 466w
Hillingdon 698
Housing construction 697–8

Housing benefits
87w, 281w, 641w
Devon 528w
Government grants to local authorities 528–9w
Mentally ill 641w
Northamptonshire 87w
Single people 200–1w
Social security abuse 527–8w
Social security benefits rules 527w

Housing construction
Carrickfergus 243w, 335–6w
Council housing 697–9
Housing associations 697–8

Housing Corporation
Loans 732w

Housing for Wales
Loans 727–8w

Housing standards
Landlord and tenant 299–300w

Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(04.03.97) 768–93

***Howard, Rt Hon Michael**, Secretary of State for the Home Department*
Debates etc.
Administration of justice, Ministerial statements (27.02.97) 429–42
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 917–27, 956–7
Questions
African National Congress, Bombings 128–9w
Billing, Home Office 700w
Cellular phones, Disclosure of information 127–8w
Civil service agencies, Home Office 433w
Contracts for services, Home Office 536–7w
Criminal proceedings, Evidence 291–2w
Environmental audit, Home Office 128w
Fire Service College, Government grants 700–1w
Hazardous materials, Home Office 128w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 429–30w
Parliamentary questions, Home Office 432w
Private finance initiative, Home Office 699w
Scottish Grand Committee, Home Office 127w
Telephone tapping, Admissibility of evidence 603–4w
Theft, Home Office 433w
Young offenders, Crime prevention 539–40w

Howarth, Mr Alan
Questions
Benefits Agency Medical Service, Contracts for services 203–7w, 310–1w
Carers, Social security benefits 86w

***Howarth, Mr Alan**—continued*
Contracts for services, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 295–6w
Contracts for services, Crown Prosecution Service 471–2w
Contracts for services, Dept for Education and Employment 413–4w
Contracts for services, Dept of Health 380–2w
Contracts for services, Dept of National Heritage 273w
Contracts for services, Dept of Social Security 562w
Contracts for services, Dept of the Environment 460–1w
Contracts for services, Dept of Trade and Industry 411–2w
Contracts for services, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 420–2w
Contracts for services, Home Office 536–7w
Contracts for services, Lord Chancellor's Dept 507w
Contracts for services, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 512–3w
Contracts for services, Ministry of Defence 256–7w
Dept of Social Security, Parliamentary questions 208w
Disability working allowance 88w
Disability working allowance, Earnings rules 88w
Earnings rules 526–7w
Family benefits 132
Family credit, Child care 529w
Family credit, Maintenance 530w
Free school meals 281w
Handicap benefits, Earnings rules 88w
Handicap benefits, Social security recipients 639–40w
Home responsibilities protection 526w
Housing benefits 87w
Housing benefits, Social security abuse 527–8w
Housing benefits, Social security benefits rules 527w
Incapacity benefit 279w
Invalid care allowances 207–8w
Invalidity benefits, Therapeutic earnings allowance 525w
Jobmatch scheme 265w
Jobseeker's allowance, Availability for work 258w
Jobseeker's allowance, Part-time employment 258–9w
Social security benefits 208w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Contracts for services 529–30w, 561w
Social security benefits rules, Part-time education 279–80w

Howarth, Mr George
Questions
Category C prisoners, Prison staff 606w
Magistrates' courts 216w
Military Corrective Training Centre Colchester, Industrial health and safety 213w
Prison population, Ethnic groups 213w
Prisoners, Childbirth 435–6w
Prisoners, Drug abuse 213–4w, 434–5w
Prisoners, Restraint equipment 437w
Prisons 696w
Prisons, Babies 438w
Prisons, Security 694w
Prisons, Ships 606w, 698w
Rehabilitation of offenders 211–2w
Whitemoor Prison, Prisoner escapes 694w
Whitemoor Prison Escape Inquiry 693w
Young offenders, Crime prevention 127w

Howe of Aveyavon Committee
see Tax Law Rewrite Steering Committee

Howell, Rt Hon David
Questions
Metrication, Prosecutions 171w
South West Trains 49w

Howell, Sir Ralph
Questions
Scottish Grand Committee 643w
Women's employment, EC countries 16w

Howells, Dr Kim
Questions
Dept of Trade and Industry, Government offices for the regions 292–3w
National Lottery, Sports 625w

Hoyle, Mr Doug
Questions
Ministers, Accountability 623w

Hughes, Mr Robert G
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 633
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 161
Questions
Sexual offences, Disclosure of information 132w
Social security benefits, Political refugees 138–9
Taxation, Scotland 893

Hughes, Mr Roy
Questions
Lone parents, Child care 140–1

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Business questions (06.03.97) 1038
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 164
NHS (24.02.97) 27–8, 35, 53–61, 72–3
Sex Offenders Bill, Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 237–8, 240
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Private hospitals 657w
Ambulance services 442w
Bishops 66w
Breast cancer, Screening 657w
Cancer, Hospital patients 657w
Church Commissioners, Finance 18–9
Clergy, Labour costs 66w
Economic and monetary union, Departmental coordination 8–9
Eye tests 514w
Food labelling 1007
Glaucoma 444–6w
Health authorities, Executives 736–7w
Health service staff, Pay 736w
Health service staff, Women 441w
Mental health services, Finance 442w
NHS, Audit 267–8w
NHS internal market 382w
Nurses' training, Student numbers 441w
Nurses' training, Student wastage 445w
Speech therapy 736w
Surgery, Hospital admissions 445w
Surgery, Hospital waiting lists 658w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 332w

Human rights
Indonesia 56w
Ivory Coast 468w

Humberside
Schools 263w

Hunger strikes
Immigrant detainees 603w

Hunt, Rt Hon David,
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1074–8, 1081

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 948–9
Questions
Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969 729w
European Commission, Billing 619w
Surgery, Hospital admissions 656–7w

Hunterston B
Radiation hazards 903–9

Hurd, Douglas
Business appointments 1w

Hutton, Mr John
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 222–3, 227

Hydrocarbon oil duties
Environmental policy 405–6w

Hyperactivity
Medical research 69w

Hypertension
269w

I spy strangers
(28.02.97) 527

Identification
Animals 1016–7

Identity cards
537–8w

Illsley, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Hormone treatments (24.02.97) 127
Questions
Action for community employment, Northern Ireland 412–3
Heseltine, Michael 710
Nature reserves, Northern Ireland 244w
Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service 185w
Prescription drugs 735w

Immigrant detainees
Hunger strikes 603w
Prisoners' transfers 216w
Rochester Prison 603w

Immigration and Nationality Division
Performance standards 432–3w

Immigration applications
Foreign spouses 58w, 314–5w

Immigration controls
223w, 706

Immigration rules
Overseas students 291w

Import controls
Genetically modified organisms 79w, 513w

Import of live animals
Smuggling 190w

Imports
Beef 76w

Incapacity benefit
201w, 279w, 530w, 639w
Medical examinations 312–3w
Northern Ireland 97–9w

Income support
281–4w
Capital rules 199–200w
Families 199w
Pensioners 136–8, 562w
Social security benefits rules 563w
Social security recipients 199w

Income tax
EC countries 135–6w
Scotland 646w
Tax rates and bands 302w, 407w
Tax yields 614w
Wales 407w, 497w

India
Overseas aid 15

Indonesia
Human rights 56w
Police training 75–6w

"Industrial Action and Trade Unions"
294w

Industrial fishing
1006

Industrial health and safety
Birmingham University 731w
Genetically modified organisms 732w
Health service staff 708
Intimidation 177w
Military Corrective Training Centre Colchester 213w
Surveys 5w

Industrial research
Foreign companies in UK 61–2w
Government departments 621w

Industrial Tribunals
Legal aid scheme 620

Inflation
15w, 236w, 493w, 615w
Economic forecasting 615w

Influenza
Vaccination 73–4w, 382–3w, 388w
Wales 388w

Information services
EC institutions 425w, 484w
European communities 4–5

Ingram, Mr Adam
Debates etc.
Private notice question intervention (05.03.97) 910
Questions
Airbuses, Government assistance to industry 619–20w
Foreign companies in UK, Industrial research 61–2w
Insurance, Genetics 293–4w
Nuclear power, Scotland 909
Research councils, Government grants 252w
Science and technology, Women's employment 480w
Science and technology research, Contracts of employment 480–1w
Science Technology and Mathematics Council 560w

Inheritance tax
Art works 306w
Tax yields 307w

Inland Revenue
Contracts 494–5w
Performance standards 406w, 492–3w

Institute of Food Research
Research finance 293w
Scientists 482w, 620w, 653w, 662w

Insurance
Genetics 293–4w

Insurance companies
4w, 250–1w

Integrated schools
Newtownards 95w

Intelligence and Security Committee
Annual reports 2w

Inter agency cooperation
Missing persons 142–3

Internal Market Advisory Committee
Complaints 223–5w

International Development Association
543–4w

International Fund for Agricultural Development
UK contributions 302w

International Labour Organisation
30w

International trade
Cuba 61w

Intervention stocks
Beef 683w

Intimidation
Industrial health and safety 177w
Lost working days 176–7w

Invalid care allowances
207–8w

Invalidity benefits
Therapeutic earnings allowance 525w

Iran
Overseas trade 484w

Iraq
Overseas aid 75w
Sanctions (28.02.97) 598–606

Iraq-Kuwait conflict
Compensation 701–2w
War pensions 719w

Israel
EC external relations (24.02.97) 122

Italy
(05.03.97) 867–74

Ivermectin
Salmon 524w, 581–2w

Ivory Coast
Human rights 468w

Jack, Rt Hon Michael,* *Financial Secretary to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1082, 1090
Questions
Allcock, Michael, Prosecutions 405w
Fraud, Government departments 138w
Income tax, EC countries 135–6w
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 302w, 407w
Income tax, Tax yields 614w
Income tax, Wales 407w, 497w
Inheritance tax, Art works 306w
Inheritance tax, Tax yields 307w
Inland Revenue, Contracts 494–5w
Inland Revenue, Performance standards 406w, 492–3w
Life insurance, Taxation 139w
London Underground, Privatisation 533w
Married personal allowance 307w
Mortgage relief 493w
Mortgage relief, Scotland 138w
Pension funds, Taxation 307w
Personal pensions, Tax allowances 135w, 707–8w

Jack, Rt Hon Michael*—*continued
Private finance initiative 617w
Private finance initiative, Treasury 408w
Privatisation, Administrative costs 138–40w
Privatisation, Advertising 236–7w
Profit sharing, Tax allowances 137w
Public sector assets 236w
Self-assessment of tax 405w
Share ownership schemes 614w
Tax burden 17w
Tax Law Rewrite Steering Committee 308w
Unpaid taxes, Tax collection 135w

Jackson, Helen
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 193–4w, 683–4w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 79w, 190–3w
Council housing, Housing construction 697–8
Cryptosporidia, Water supply 731w
Employment opportunities, Lone parents 262w
Environment protection, Government grants 217–8w
General elections 709–10
Noise 220–1w
Water and sewerage companies, Company finance 602w

Jackson, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1091–6

Jamieson, Mr David
Questions
Armed forces education allowances 637w
Armed forces education allowances, Boarding schools 369w
Armed forces education allowances, Quantock School 117w
Armed forces housing, Rents 369–70w, 403w
Assisted places scheme 29w
Beef, Armed forces catering services 1017
Benefits Agency district offices, Camborne 532w
Bradfield House School Cullompton 414–5w, 631–2w
Grant maintained schools, Cheshire 323
Hong Kong Government, Private education 314w
MFV Pescado, Shipping accidents 296–7w
Military aircraft, Air accidents 589w
Millennium Commission, Plymouth 613
Naval bases, Plymouth 371w
Youth courts, Cullompton 505w

Janner, Mr Greville
Questions
Industrial Tribunals, Legal aid scheme 620
Unemployment 262w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 447
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1112
Questions
Alternative dispute resolution 623
Council tax, Essex 595w
Ecstasy 442–3w
Fishing quotas, North Sea 743w
Grammar schools 259–60w
Housing Corporation, Loans 732w
Local government expenditure 693–4

Jenkins, Mr Brian David
Questions
Class sizes, Primary education 259w
Closed circuit television, Tamworth 129w

Jenkins, Mr Brian David*—*continued
Closed circuit television, West Midlands 129w
Foreign investment in UK, Employment opportunities 62–3w
Government assistance to industry, West Midlands 171–2w, 174–6w
Regional selective assistance, West Midlands 172–3w

Jersey
Constitutions 132w

Jessel, Mr Toby
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 39
Questions
Beef, Exports 1012–3
Devolution, Scotland 888–9
India, Overseas aid 15

Job security
319–21

Jobmatch scheme
265w

Jobseeker's Allowance
258w, 337–8w, 470–1w, 563w, 632–3w, 641w
Availability for work 258w
Disabled workers 471w
National insurance contributions 313w
Part-time employment 258–9w
Rural areas 262w
Social security abuse 313w
Social security appeals 718w

Jobseeker's Allowance (Contract for Work) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 678–9

Jobseeker's Allowance (Project Work Pilot Scheme) (No 2) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 678–9

Jobseeker's Allowance (Project Work Pilot Scheme) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 678–9

Jobseeker's Allowance (Workskill Courses) Pilot Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 678–9

Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc.
NATO (26.02.97) 261
NHS (24.02.97) 48–53, 59
Questions
Teachers, East Sussex 264w

Joint Service Command and Staff College
254w, 711–2w

Jones, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 634
Questions
Aerospace industry, Wales 448w
Air pollution 596w
Arts sponsorship 616
Dee estuary, Environment protection 277–8w
Environment protection, Crime 703
High technology, Wales 447–8w
Local government, Legislation 90w, 597–8w
Power stations, Deeside 278w, 448w
Pupil exclusions, Clwyd 447w
Teachers, Early retirement 27w
Unemployment, Wales 448w
Youth unemployment, Wales 448w

Jones, Mr Gwilym*, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
Debates etc.
Welsh Development Agency Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.97) 794, 797–8, 804–6
Questions
Aerospace industry, Wales 448w
Blood transfusion services, Wales 91w
Child workers, Wales 725w
Death, Wales 667w, 724w
Death, Weather 665–6w
District health authorities, Administrative costs 94w
Gastroschisis, Wales 672w
GP fundholders, Wales 93–4w
Local government, Legislation 90w
Local government reform, Glamorgan 533w
Local government staff, Wales 668–71w
Medical treatments, Weather 665–6w
Meningitis, Gwynedd 387–8w
Motorways, Wales 387w
Planning Inspectorate, Performance standards 469w
Power stations, Deeside 448w
Private finance initiative, Welsh Office 725w
Unemployment, Wales 448w
Youth unemployment, Wales 448w

Jones, Mr Ieuan Wyn
Debates etc.
Wales (27.02.97) 463, 501–5
Questions
Deviance and behaviour disorders, Prescription drugs 736w

Jones, Mr Jon Owen
Debates etc.
Wales (27.02.97) 509–10
Welsh Development Agency Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.97) 795
Questions
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 450w
Income support, Pensioners 136–7
Pre-school education, Cardiff 449w
Small businesses, Trade competitiveness 59–60w

Jones, Dr Lynne
Questions
Air pollution 596w
Educational finance, Birmingham 260w
Housing benefits, Single people 200–1w
Miscarriages of justice, Compensation 698w

Jones, Mr Martyn David
Questions
Agricultural chemicals 681–2w
Agricultural chemicals, Taxation 674–5w
Aid financed trade 468w
Baby milks 735–6w, 746w
British Agrochemicals' Association 217w, 622w
Bus services, Rural areas 546w
Church Commissioners, Air pollution control 65–6w
Domestic energy consumption, VAT 560w
Environmental audit, Attorney General 21–2w
Environmental audit, Dept of Social Security 639w
Environmental audit, Home Office 128w
Environmental audit, Lord Chancellor's Dept 12w
Environmental audit, Lord President of the Council 13–4w
Environmental audit, Northern Ireland Office 99–100w

Jones, Mr Martyn David—*continued*
Environmental audit, Treasury 136w
Food industry, Safety standards 194–5w
Food microbiology, Safety standards 196–7w
Hazardous materials, Attorney General 22w
Hazardous materials, Dept of Social Security 527w
Hazardous materials, Dept of the Environment 216–7w
Hazardous materials, Home Office 128w
Hazardous materials, House of Commons Commission 20w
Hazardous materials, Lord Chancellor's Dept 12–3w
Hazardous materials, Lord President of the Council 14w
Hazardous materials, Northern Ireland Office 239–40w
Hazardous materials, Treasury 136w
Nitrogen oxides, Air pollution 600w
Overseas aid, Agricultural production 542–3w
Overseas aid, Contracts 541–2w
Rivers, Water abstraction 598w
White fish, Fish conservation 571w
Wood 600w

Jones, Mr Robert B, Minister of State, Dept of the Environment
Debates etc.
Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (03.03.97) 637–44, 646, 654
Questions
British Waterways Board, External financing limits 220w
British Waterways Board, Government grants 7–8w
Building regulations, Fees and charges 155w
Building Research Establishment 8w
City Challenge, Stockton 593–4w
Foundation for the Built Environment 8w
Housing and handicapped, Building regulations 601–2w
Mining, Pollution control 219–20w
Nitrate sensitive areas 155–6w
Norchem, Recycling 594w
Opencast mining, Planning appeals 700–1
Private finance initiative, Dept of the Environment 730–1w

Jowell, Ms Tessa
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Crimes of violence 71w
Ashworth Hospital Inquiry 1997 70–1w
Death, Pneumonia 615–6w
German measles, Congenital abnormalities 520w
Hospital waiting lists 71w
Mothers, Welfare foods 519–20w
NHS, Building repairs 519w
NHS finance 519w
Road accidents, Drugs 48–9w
Social Security appeal tribunals, Southwark 90w
Surgery, Hospital admissions 519w

Jubilee line
504w

Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
3R adjourned (28.02.97) 527
Business questions (06.03.97) 1038, 1039

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 348, 350–1
Scottish Legal Service Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill, Report and 3R (26.02.97) 370
Questions
Beef, Exports 1012–3
Jobseeker's allowance, Rural areas 262w
Local government expenditure, Highlands of Scotland 645w

Kennedy, Mrs Jane
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 34–5, 49, 76–84

Kent
Birds 572w
Export of live animals 747–8w
Grammar schools 336

Key, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
National Heritage Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 200
NHS (24.02.97) 23
Questions
Armed forces, EC law 588–9w
Countryside Commission, Consultants 466–7w
Countryside Commission, Cultural heritage 466w
International Development Association 543–4w
Police equipment, Chemical weapons 3w
Rabies 514w
Salisbury bypass 504–5w, 712–3w

Kielder forest
Armed forces training 115w

Kilfoyle, Mr Peter
Questions
Assisted places scheme 322

King, Fiona
Criminal appeals 708w

King, Rt Hon Tom
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 36

King Committee
see Intelligence and Security Committee

King's College London Bill (HL) 1994/95
Debates etc.
3R order read (25.02.97) 131, (04.03.97) 693

Kirkcudbright
Firing ranges 111w

Kirkhope, Mr Timothy, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 555, 571–4
Hood, Wayne, Prisoners (05.03.97) 862–6
Prisons (Alcohol Testing) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 543–51
Sex Offenders Bill, Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 223–9, 233–4, 238, 240–1, 244
War crimes (05.03.97) 1000–4
Questions
Deportation 605–6w
Gaming clubs, Croydon 538w
Immigration and Nationality Division, Performance standards 432–3w
Immigration rules, Overseas students 291w
Insurance companies 4w
McAliskey, Roisin, Extradition 132–3w

Kirkhope, Mr Timothy—*continued*
Miscarriages of justice, Compensation 698w
Political refugees, Sri Lanka 2–3w
Rabies 539w

Kirklees
Sixth form education 553–5w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 740–3, 751
Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (03.03.97) 643
Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order(03.03.97) 661
Scottish Borders Council, Public petitions (04.03.97) 807
Questions
Capital challenge, Scotland 889
Community councils, Scotland 649w
Council house sales, Wales 387w
Pesca initiative, Berwickshire 35–6w

Knight, Mrs Angela, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Economic Secretary) to the Treasury
Questions
Age, Treasury 134–5w
Average earnings 496w
Billing, Government departments 139w
Civil service agencies, Treasury 490w
Consultants, Treasury 496w
Consumer expenditure, Wales 140–1w
Death, Pneumonia 615–6w
Death, Weather 490–1w
Death rate 237w, 303–5w, 491–2w
Electorate 4–5w, 15w
Employment 17–8w, 238w
Employment, Lone parents 137w
Environmental audit, Treasury 136w
Food poisoning 307–8w
Gastroschisis 238–9w
Hazardous materials, Treasury 136w
Inflation 236w, 493w, 615w
Inflation, Economic forecasting 615w
National income 496–7w
National income, Accounting 489–90w
National Savings Agency 306–7w
Oil prices 616–7w
Parliamentary questions, Treasury 303–4w
Perinatal mortality 16–7w
Personal income 134w
Personal Investment Authority 16w
Personal pensions, Marketing 15–6w, 307w
Prices 18–9w
Securities and Investments Board 18w
Statistics 19w, 307w
Theft, Treasury 305w
Unemployed, Take-up of employment 495–6w
Unemployment 14–5w, 17w, 141w
Unemployment, Statistics 136–7w
Women's employment, EC countries 16w
Youth employment 139–40w
Youth unemployment 14w

Knight, Rt Hon Greg, Minister for Industry and Energy
Questions
Airbuses, Government assistance to industry 619–20w
British Agrochemicals' Association 622w
EC grants and loans 584–5w
EC grants and loans, Blyth Valley 619w
Foreign companies in UK, Industrial research 61–2w

***Knight, Rt Hon Greg**—continued*
Foreign investment in UK, Eastern region 413w
Foreign investment in UK, Employment opportunities 62–3w
Regional selective assistance 622w
Swan Hunter Shipbuilders 245–6w

Knight, Dame Jill
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 43
Questions
Birmingham City Council, Contracts for services 426
Local government expenditure, Scotland 645w

Know-how Fund
Bulgaria 14
Eastern Europe 13–4
Romania 14

Knox, Sir David
Questions
Cost per pupil, Scotland 899–900
Council house sales 596w
Teachers, Staffordshire 263–4w
Tourism, East Midlands 498w

Korean War
Military decorations 118w

Kyle, David
Criminal appeals 708w

***Kynoch, Mr George**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office*
Debates etc.
Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (26.02.97) 385–6, 388–9, 393–4
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 714–26, 728, 730, 735–6, 742, 746, 761–3
Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Bill (HL), Rem stages (25.02.97) 197
Scottish Legal Service Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill, Report and 3R (26.02.97) 372
Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Bill (HL), Rem stages (25.02.97) 195
Questions
Air routes, Scotland 43–4w
Capital challenge, Scotland 889–91
Community councils, Scotland 649w
Council tax, Scotland 886–8
EC grants and loans, Scotland 46–8w
Economic situation, North Ayrshire 644w
Economic situation, Scotland 646w
Educational finance, Scotland 38–42w
Employment, Scotland 644w
Flood control, Scotland 645w
Glenfeshie Estate, Management agreements 687w
Local authorities, Scotland 688w
Local government expenditure, Highlands of Scotland 645w
Local government finance, Scotland 645w
Local government revenue, Scotland 160–2w
Locate in Scotland 521–2w
Non-domestic rates, Scotland 644–5w
Pesca initiative, Berwickshire 35–6w
Public expenditure, Glasgow 901–2
Railway travel, Cairngorms 644w
Revenue support grant, Scotland 644w
River Tay, Flood control 645–6w
Salmon, Scotland 524w
Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research 48w

***Kynoch, Mr George**—continued*
Shipbuilding, Scotland 643w
Sites of special scientific interest, Scotland 391w
Special islands needs allowance, Scotland 644w
Tree felling, Balblair 647w
Unemployment, Scotland 643w
Water supply industry, Scotland 642–3w

Laboratories
Dental services 566–8w

Labour costs
Central Office of Information 125–6w
Clergy 66w
European Parliament Members 58w
Members 58w

Labour Party
Taxation 1020

Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Questions
Antismoking campaign, EC action 565–6w
EC institutions, Information services 425w, 484w
EC institutions, Operating costs 484w
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 407w

Lancashire
Assisted places scheme 555w
Educational finance 553w
Pre-school education 625–6w
Single regeneration budget 600w
Social rented housing 466w

Land Registration Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475

Landlord and tenant
Housing standards 299–300w

"Landlord and Tenant"
299–300w

Lang, Rt Hon Ian, *President of the Board of Trade*
Questions
Business, Ministers' domestic visits 64w, 618–9w, 704w
Civil service agencies, Dept of Trade and Industry 169w
EC external trade 248–50w
Privatisation 412w
"Privatisation: Setting Enterprise Free" 479–80w
UK trade with EC 246–8w

Languages education
Primary education 266w

Latin America
57w
Forest protection 13
Overseas aid 13

Law centres
507w, 622

Law of war
Departmental publications 403w

Law Officers' Dept
see Attorney General

Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 447–8, (06.03.97) 1038
Questions
Government grants to voluntary organisations 393–5w

Leasehold housing
Scotland 232w

Leeds
Higher education admission 625w
Pre-school education 626w

Legal advice and assistance
Defamation 13w
Scotland (26.02.97) 396

Legal aid
505w
Fraud 620–1
Hormone treatments 691w
Per capita costs 621–2
Scotland 157–8w
Young offenders 399w

Legal aid scheme
620–3
Industrial Tribunals 620
Scotland (26.02.97) 396

Legal costs
Councillors 219w
Offenders 505w

Legal opinion
European Court of Human Rights 319–20w

Legal profession
Prison visits 288–9w

Legg, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 360–3
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1066

Leigh, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 636
Questions
Retirement pensions 202w

Leisure
Deregulation initiative 7

Lester, Rt Hon Jim
Debates etc.
Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (03.03.97) 639

Lestor, Miss Joan
Questions
National Lottery, Disaster relief 611
Teachers, Child abuse 26–7w

Lever Park Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (25.02.97) 131, (04.03.97) 693
Public petitions (25.02.97) 248

Lewisham Hospital
Public petitions (28.02.97) 526

Libyan Arab Republic
Sanctions (28.02.97) 598–606

Licensing laws
Deregulation initiative 7–8

Licensing (Reform) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 594

Lichfield
Economic situation 156w

Liddell, Helen
Debates etc.
National Heritage Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 198
Questions
Educational standards, Scotland 899

Lidington, Mr David
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 162
Questions
Buckinghamshire Health Authority, Finance 446w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 335
Government research establishments, Crowthorne 551w
Health authorities, Finance 446–7w
Inheritance tax, Tax yields 307w
Married personal allowance 307w
Mortgage relief 493w
Town and country planning, Sustainable development 9–12w

Life insurance
Taxation 139w

Light dues
716w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter, Secretary of State for Social Security
Debates etc.
Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill (HL), 2R and money res (25.02.97) 170–4
Questions
Family benefits 131–3
Income support 283–4w
Parent plus 143–4
Pension rights, Divorce settlements 285w
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits uprating 134–5
Scottish Grand Committee, Dept of Social Security 309–10w
War pensions, Ear disorders 398w

Limitation Act 1980
Questions
319w

Limitation of actions
319w, 506w

Listed buildings
Scotland (25.02.97) 196–7
Wales 671–2w

Litter
594w
M45 609w

Livingstone, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 157–8
McAliskey, Roisin, Points of order (05.03.97) 952
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 924–5, 955
Questions
Northern Ireland government 419
Nuclear weapons tests, Exservicemen 402–3w, 717–8w
Riot control weapons 463w
Riot control weapons, Northern Ireland 721w

Lloyd, Nicholas
544w

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
NATO (26.02.97) 271–4
Questions
Armed forces training, Rwanda 587–8w

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Questions
Election administration, Welsh language 667w
Handicapped, Discrimination 142

Loans
Housing Corporation 732w
Housing for Wales 727–8w
London Underground 418w

Lobsters
Fish conservation 1006–7

Local authorities
Public Works Loan Board 617w
Scotland 688w

Local authority powers
9
Northern Ireland 332–3w
Road traffic control 511w

Local education authorities
Administrative costs 323–5
Cost per pupil 627–30w

Local Elections (Variations of Limits of Candidates Election Expenses) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 659–64

Local government
Departmental responsibilities 122w
Legislation 90w, 597–8w
Wales 90w

Local Government (Conduct of Officers) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
1R (25.02.97) 166–9

Local government expenditure
6–7w, 693–4
Community care 697
Highlands of Scotland 645w
Scotland 645w

Local government finance
8–9w, 594w
Birmingham 693
City of Westminster 701
Northern Ireland 664w
Scotland 645w, (04.03.97) 714–67
Wales 724w

Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(04.03.97) 714–67

Local government functions
122w

Local Government (Gaelic Names) (Scotland) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475

Local government reform
Glamorgan 533w

Local government revenue
Scotland 160–2w

Local government social services
Children 381–2w
Elderly 383–4w
Performance standards 381w

Local government staff
599–600w
Wales 668–71w

Local plans
Down and Newry 240–1w
Mourne 240–1w

Locate in Scotland
521–2w

Lockerbie
Bombings 419–20w, 524–5w, 706w, 883–4, 1021–2

London allowance
Civil servants 287–8w

London and Continental Railways
551w

London Buses
Subsidies 550w

London Docklands
Bombings 298w

London Transport
Finance 533w

London Transport Museum
549w

London Underground
Advertising 548w
Crime 52w
Finance 502–3w
Investment 503w, 548–9w
Loans 418w
Marketing 549w
Ministerial statements (25.02.97) 149–65
Performance standards 504w
Privatisation 144–8, 503–4w, 533w, 547–8w, 715w
Rents 549w
Tunnels 501w

Lone parents
Child care 140–1
Employment 137w
Employment opportunities 262w
Employment schemes 200w

Long Lartin Prison
Body searches 214–6w

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Billing 691–2w
Contracts for services 507w
Environmental audit 12w
Hazardous materials 12–3w
Private finance initiative 692–3w

Lord President of the Council
Environmental audit 13–4w
Hazardous materials 14w

Lorries
Axle weights 50w, 611–2w, 715–6w
Motor vehicle safety 502w

Lost working days
Health service staff 73w
Intimidation 176–7w
Stress related illnesses 8w, 29–30w, 73w
Teachers 29–30w

Low flying
Military aircraft 107–8w
Night flying 107–8w

Loyden, Mr Eddie
Questions
Hillsborough Stadium Inquiry 603w

Luff, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Road Traffic Reduction Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 578–82
Questions
EC Foreign Affairs Council 425–8w
Economic situation 709
Government research establishments, Efficiency scrutinies 685w
Lone parents, Employment schemes 200w
Milk, Marketing 744w
National Lottery, Worcestershire 498w

***Luff, Mr Peter**—continued*
Norchem, Recycling 594w

Luton
Theft 4w

Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas, Attorney-General
Questions
Billing, Attorney General 708–9w
Contracts for services, Crown Prosecution Service 471–2w
Habanako, Y 179w
King, Fiona, Criminal appeals 708w
Kyle, David, Criminal appeals 708w
Magistrates' courts, Prosecutions 21w
Parliamentary questions, Attorney General 235w
Prosecutions 187–9w
Sexual offences, Prosecutions 234–5w
Theft, Attorney General 235–6w

Lynne, Liz,
Debates etc.
Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill (HL), 2R and money res (25.02.97) 179–80
Questions
Child Support Agency, Administrative delays 82w
Child Support Agency, Advertising 83w
Child Support Agency, Debts 198–9w
Class sizes, Primary education 328
County courts, Closures 691w
Handicapped, Discrimination 142
Maintenance, Children 82–5w
Private patients, Prescriptions 569w
Tipping of waste, Planning permission 599w

M25
Road works 142w

M45
Litter 609w

M74
231w

M80
(05.03.97) 875–82

McAliskey, Roisin
Extradition 132–3w, 147–8w, 214w, 290w, 430w

McAllion, Mr John
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 717, 755–8
Questions
Greenhouse effect 594w
Taxation, Scotland 892–3

McAvoy, Mr Thomas
Questions
Council housing finance 699
Health services, Scotland 646w
NHS finance, Scotland 897
Northern Ireland Parades Commission 333w

McCartney, Mr Ian
Questions
Theft, Attorney General 235–6w
Theft, Cabinet Office 166w
Theft, Dept for Education and Employment 264w
Theft, Dept of Health 268w
Theft, Dept of National Heritage 146w
Theft, Dept of Social Security 717w
Theft, Dept of the Environment 459w
Theft, Dept of Trade and Industry 176w
Theft, Dept of Transport 54w

***McCartney, Mr Ian**—continued*
Theft, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 56w
Theft, Home Office 433w
Theft, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 322w
Theft, Ministry of Defence 371–8w
Theft, Northern Ireland Office 509–10w
Theft, Scottish Office 456–7w
Theft, Treasury 305w
Theft, Welsh Office 277w

McCartney, Mr Robert
Questions
Action for community employment, Northern Ireland 412
Public appointments, Northern Ireland 721w
Road traffic control, Local authority powers 511w

McCrea, Rev William
Debates etc.
Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order (05.03.97) 986–9
Questions
Action for community employment, Northern Ireland 412

Macdonald, Mr Calum
Debates etc.
Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 769, 778–80

McFall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Contract (Scotland) Bill, 3R (26.02.97) 368
National Heritage Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 201
Sex Offenders Bill, Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 242–3, 245–6
Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Bill (HL), Rem stages (25.02.97) 195
Questions
Child abuse, Scotland 451–2w
Legal aid, Scotland 157–8w
Paedophilia, Scotland 450–1w
Police stations, Easterhouse 225w
Sites of special scientific interest, Scotland 391w
Taxation, Scotland 894
Tree felling, Balblair 647w

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Debates etc.
Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order (05.03.97) 976–80
Questions
Farm and countryside enhancement scheme, Northern Ireland 95w
Local plans, Down and Newry 240–1w

MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 156

McKelvey, Mr William
Debates etc.
Elderly, Scotland (26.02.97) 289–90
Questions
Flood control, Scotland 645w
UN Conference on Environment and Development 55w

Mackinlay, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Dartford-Thurrock Crossing (Amendment) Bill, 1R (26.02.97) 337
NATO (26.02.97) 265–8
NHS (24.02.97) 30, 33

***Mackinlay, Mr Andrew**—continued*
United Kingdom Membership of European Union (Research) Bill, 1R (04.03.97) 711
Questions
Belmarsh Prison, Prison accommodation 289w
Cambridge Military Hospital, Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 710w
Category A prisoners, Prison visits 289w
Cultural heritage 607–8
EC enlargement 16–7
Electoral register, Northern Ireland 330w
Former ministers, Redundancy pay 11
Genetically modified organisms, Environment protection 732w
Genetics, Cancer hazards 731w
House of Commons questions, Scotland 20–1w
M25, Road works 142w
Meningitis 182w
Meningitis, Health education 181–2w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 739–40w
Minimum wage 246w
Sexual offences 130–1w
Sexual offences, Criminal injuries compensation 131–2w
Sexual offences, Prosecutions 234–5w
Social security benefits, Expenditure 19w
State visits 707w
Unemployment 333–4
Voluntary work, Criminal records 463w, 700w

Maclean, Rt Hon David, Minister of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 238, 241–2, 245
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 537w
Arrests 130w
Closed circuit television, Crime prevention 540w
Closed circuit television, Tamworth 129w
Closed circuit television, West Midlands 129w
Drugs, Road accidents 4w
Firearms certificates, Greater London 3w
Hillsborough Stadium Inquiry 603w
Homicide, Prison sentences 698w
Homicide, Sentencing 698w
Metropolitan Police 214w
Metropolitan Police, Chemical weapons 538w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 430–2w
Offences against children 463–4w
Offensive weapons 604–5w
Paedophilia 132w
Police 699–700w
Police, Civil servants' secondment 433–4w
Police, Recruitment 698w
Police custody, Death 129w, 437w
Police equipment, Chemical weapons 3w
Police informers 133w
Police national computer, Sexuality 463w
Prisons, Ships 698w
Prosecutions 133w
Riot control weapons 463w
Sexual offences 130–1w, 696–7w
Sexual offences, Criminal injuries compensation 131–2w
Sexual offences, Disclosure of information 132w
Sexual offences, Nottingham 697w
Sexual offences, Sentencing 603w
Theft, Luton 4w
Victim support schemes 538–9w
Voluntary work, Criminal records 463w, 700w

Maclean, Rt Hon David*—*continued
Young offenders 432w
Young offenders, Administration of justice 464w
Young offenders, Crime prevention 127w

McLeish, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (25.02.97) 137
Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill (HL), 2R and money res (25.02.97) 189–91
Questions
Income support, Pensioners 137

Maclennan, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 628
National Heritage Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 203–5
Questions
National Lottery 617–8

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Basic pension plus, Points of order (05.03.97) 913
McAliskey, Roisin, Points of order (05.03.97) 959–60
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 918, 921–2, 931–2, 952
Questions
Belmarsh Prison, Prison education services 429w
McAliskey, Roisin, Extradition 214w, 430w
Northern Ireland government 329w
Northern Ireland Grand Committee 167w
Prisoners, Complaints 214w
Prisoners, Drug abuse 288w
Prisoners, Video recordings 214–6w, 428w
Whitemoor Prison, Prisoner escapes 428–9w

MacShane, Mr Denis
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 355–6, 363–4, 366
Members' constituency work, Points of order (05.03.97) 911
Questions
Albania 56w, 223w
Albania, Armed forces 105w
Albania, Official gifts 156w, 314w
Albania, Overseas aid 702w
Albania, Overseas trade 63w
Profit sharing, Tax allowances 137w
Share ownership schemes 614w

McWilliam, Mr John
Questions
Lloyd, Nicholas 544w

Madden, Mr Max
Debates etc.
IRA, Points of order (06.03.97) 1046
McAliskey, Roisin, Points of order (05.03.97) 953, 960
Questions
Foreign spouses, Immigration applications 58w, 314–5w
McAliskey, Roisin, Extradition 132–3w, 147–8w, 290w
Military intelligence, Morwenstowe 59w
Millennium Club, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 59w
RAF Edzell 119w
RAF Feltwell 119w
RAF Menwith Hill 119w

Madden, Mr Max*—*continued
RAF Menwith Hill, Armed forces officers 119w
RAF Menwith Hill, Security of tenure 118–9w
US bases, Security of tenure 118–9w

Madel, Sir David
Questions
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 552w

Magheramorne
Tipping of waste 245w

Maginnis, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
McAliskey, Roisin, Points of order (05.03.97) 960
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 934, 949–50, 952

Magistrates' courts
216w
Prosecutions 21w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 448
Women, Points of order (05.03.97) 911
Questions
Rents to mortgages scheme 595w

Maintenance
Children 82–5w, 139–40, 198w
Family credit 530w

Maitland, Lady Olga
Debates etc.
Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 560–4, 567, 569
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 163
NHS (24.02.97) 98–102
Prisons (Alcohol Testing) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 531–2, 538–9, 544–5
Questions
Civil proceedings 506w
Council tax, Scotland 887–8
Family benefits 132
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Cash limits 278w
National Lottery 499w
School discipline 261w

Major, Rt Hon John, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the CivilService
Questions
Albania, Official gifts 156w
Armed forces medical services 424–5
Army reserves 427
Bank of England 423–4
Birmingham City Council, Contracts for services 426
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 427–8
Clones 148
Conservative Party 708
Conservative Party, Finance 708–9
Devolution, Scotland 146–7
Economic growth 147
Economic situation 709
Economic situation, Lichfield 156w
Educational standards 425
European Council, Cardiff 156w
European Movement 1021
General elections 709–10
Gulf war syndrome 423, 425–7, 545w
Health service staff, Industrial health and safety 708
Heath, Edward 144, 146
Heseltine, Michael 710
Hospitals, Manchester 1020–1

Major, Rt Hon John*—*continued
House of Commons Committees of the Whole House 708
Housing 1022
Hurd, Douglas, Business appointments 1w
Immigration controls 706
Intelligence and Security Committee, Annual reports 2w
Labour Party, Taxation 1020
Lloyd, Nicholas 544w
Lockerbie, Bombings 419–20w, 706w, 1021–2
London Underground, Privatisation 144–8
Ministers, Accountability 623w
NHS 706–8
Northern Ireland government 706
Official engagements 156w, 320w, 545w, 706w
Organophosphorous pesticides 707w
Parliamentary questions, Prime Minister 320w
Retirement pensions 1017–8
Scottish Grand Committee, Prime Minister 1w
Shareholders, Privatisation 320w
Slaughterhouses, Food hygiene 1018–20
State visits 707w
Stowaways 428
Unemployment, Wales 710
Wallenberg, Raoul 146
Water charges, Profits taxes 148

Malaria
Aircrew 180w
Drug side effects 267w, 379–80w

Mallon, Mr Seamus
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 926, 933, 937, 950–3
Questions
Action for community employment, Northern Ireland 659–60w
Northern Ireland Office, Religious discrimination 511–2w
Northern Ireland Water Service Agency, Manpower 574–8w

Malone, Mr Gerald, Minister of State, Dept of Health
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Greater London 520w
Antibiotics, Prescriptions 72w
Buckinghamshire Health Authority, Finance 446w
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Public appointments 517–9w
Dental charges 568w
Dental services 66–7w
Dental services, Laboratories 566–8w
Dental services, Manpower 65–6w
Dentists, Wandsworth 382w
Doctors, Resignations 657w
Drugs, Licensing 658w
Eye tests 514w
General practitioners 383w
Glaucoma 444w
GP fundholders 74w
Health authorities, Executives 736–7w
Health service staff, Lost working days 73w
Health service staff, Pay 736w
Health service staff, Women 441w
Hospital consultants, Vacancies 267w, 514–6w
Hypertension 269w
Malaria, Aircrew 180w
Malaria, Drug side effects 267w, 379–80w
Medical treatments, Children 658w

Malone, Mr Gerald—continued
NHS finance, Greater London 741–2w
NHS internal market 382w
Nurses, Manpower 734–5w
Oral contraceptives 266w
Pameton 738w
Prescription drugs 735w
Prescriptions, Fraud 447w
Private patients, Prescriptions 569w

Manchester
Bombings 298w
Estates renewal challenge fund 297–8w
Hospitals 1020–1

Mans, Mr Keith
Questions
Employment, EC countries 334–5
Joint Service Command and Staff College 711–2w

Manufacturing industries
Trade competitiveness 9–10

Marek, Dr John
Questions
Bus Working Group 142–3w
Public appointments 124–5w

Marketing
London Underground 549w
Milk 744w
Personal pensions 15–6w, 307w

Marlow, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 348, 363, 365
Political refugees (05.03.97) 850–1, 853, 856–7
Questions
EC Committee of the Regions, Scotland 886
European Parliament Members, Labour costs 58w

Marriage
505–6w

Married personal allowance
307w

Married women
Employment 137w

Marshall, Mr David
Questions
Air routes, Scotland 43–4w
Electorate 15w
Electorate, Northern Ireland 95–6w
Hydrocarbon oil duties, Environmental policy 405–6w
M74 231w
Public expenditure, Glasgow 901–2
Road signs 54w
Road signs, Scotland 391w

Marshall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Business questions (06.03.97) 1045
Company Accounts (Disclosure of Directors Emoluments) Regulations (03.03.97) 672, 675–6
Cyprus (03.03.97) 681–4, 689
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 162–3
Questions
Air pollution 151–2w
Barnet Borough Council, Direct labour departments 602w
Closed circuit television, Crime prevention 540w
Community care, Local government expenditure 697

Marshall, Mr John—continued
Computer privacy, EC law 540w
Deregulation initiative 123w
Eastern Europe, Know-how Fund 13–4
Economic policy, Departmental coordination 3
Habitual residence test 136
Industrial Tribunals, Legal aid scheme 620
Lockerbie, Bombings 884
Petrol alternatives, Exhaust emission controls 53w
Unemployment, Scotland 643w
Young offenders, Crime prevention 539–40w

Marshall, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 631
Questions
Driving tests, Eye disorders 50w

Martin, Mr Michael J
Debates etc.
Elderly, Scotland (26.02.97) 282–4
Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 781, 787–8
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 715–7, 735–7, 744, 748, 750, 763
Questions
Hospices, Scotland 891

Martlew, Mr Eric
Questions
Battery hens, Animal welfare 743w

Mawhinney, Dr Brian S
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1065

Maxton, Mr John
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 719, 760
Questions
Sports, Young people 609

Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Questions
Beef, Northern Ireland 329w
Northern Ireland government 329w, 332w, 413–6, 420–1
Northern Ireland Parades Commission 421–2
Sinn Fein, Northern Ireland government 330w

Meacher, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (03.03.97) 639, 641, 644–8
Questions
Biodiversity 466w
Coke, Air pollution 152w
Compost 597w
Noise 734w
Organophosphorous pesticides, Research 154w
Radioactive wastes, Research 466w
Sellafield, Radioactive waste disposal 461w
Sellafield, Rock characterisation facility 464–5w, 728w
"This Common Inheritance Sixth Year Report" 633w
UN Conference on Environment and Development 696
UN Environment Programme 152–3w
Water pollution, Prosecutions 153–4w

Meat Hygiene Service
Inspections 679–80w

Medals
United Nations 593w

Medical examinations
Incapacity benefit 312–3w
Prisoners 428w

Medical research
Edinburgh Royal Infirmary 457–8w
Hyperactivity 69w
Research finance 176w

Medical students
630–1w, 704–5w

Medical treatments
Cancer 276w
Children 658w
Private patients 68w
Scotland 228–9w
Weather 228–9w, 440–1w, 665–6w

Medium term financial strategy
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 (26.02.97) 343–67

Members
Labour costs 58w

Members' constituency work
Speaker's rulings and statements (05.03.97) 911–2

Members' correspondence
272w

Members' oath and affirmation
Chapman, Ben (04.03.97) 710

Members' travel
Costs 167–8w

Meningitis
182w
Gwynedd 387–8w
Health education 181–2w

Mental health community care
658w

Mental health services
Finance 442w

Mentally disadvantaged
Scotland 45w

Mentally ill
Housing benefits 641w

Merchant, Mr Piers
Debates etc.
Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (03.03.97) 650
Questions
Air pollution control, Fees and charges 634–5w
Hedges and ditches 602w

Methane
Tipping of waste 459w

Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus
739–40w
Cambridge Military Hospital 710w

Metrication
Prosecutions 171w

Metropolitan Police
214w
Chemical weapons 538w
Manpower 429–32w

MFV Pescado
Shipping accidents 296–7w

Michael, Mr Alun
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 214–20, 228–9, 232–4, 239–41, 243–5

Michie, Mrs Ray
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 720
Questions
Countryside premium scheme, Scotland 41w
Countryside stewardship scheme 80w
Electronic tagging, Scotland 391w
Farms, Scotland 37w
Prison population, Scotland 648–50w
Prison sentences, Scotland 523w
Prisoners' release, Scotland 522–3w
Prisons, Scotland 522w
Special islands needs allowance, Scotland 644w
Young offenders 432w
Young offenders, Scotland 523w

Milburn, Mr Alan
Questions
Billing, Government departments 139w
Consultants, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 78w
Consultants, Treasury 496w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Publicity 177–9w
Fraud, Government departments 138w
Home energy efficiency scheme 730w
Income support 281–3w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Operating costs 748w
Private finance initiative, Dept for Education and Employment 706w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Health 740w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Social Security 720w
Private finance initiative, Dept of the Environment 730–1w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Trade and Industry 703w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Transport 713w
Private finance initiative, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 703w
Private finance initiative, Home Office 699w
Private finance initiative, Lord Chancellor's Dept 692–3w
Private finance initiative, Ministry of Defence 710–1w
Private finance initiative, Northern Ireland Office 721–2w
Private finance initiative, Treasury 408w
Private finance initiative, Welsh Office 725w
Privatisation, Administrative costs 138–40w
Privatisation, Advertising 236–7w
Public sector borrowing requirement 493–4w
Regional selective assistance 622w
Skill shortages 150w

Military aircraft
112w
Air accidents 114–5w, 404w, 485w, 589w
Air safety 487w
Aircrew 254w
Low flying 107–8w

Military Corrective Training Centre Colchester
Industrial health and safety 213w

Military decorations
Korean War 118w

Military intelligence
Morwenstowe 59w

Military Provost Guard Service
709w

Military vehicles
Parachuting 486w

Milk
Marketing 744w

Milk deliveries
Public petitions (03.03.97) 680

Millennium
Computers 60w, (28.02.97) 591–3
Northern Ireland 330w
Wales 500w

Millennium Club
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 59w

Millennium Commission
British Waterways Board 498w
Plymouth 613

Millennium Exhibition
146w, 497w
Finance 123w
Railway stations 269–70w
Water transport 124w

Miller, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 635
NHS (24.02.97) 75, 94–8
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1055, 1096–9, 1117–8
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1034

Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise Council
29w

Mines
Arms control negotiations 11–2
Defence procurement 120w
Treaties 120w

Minimum wage
246w

Mining
Pollution control 219–20w

Ministerial Committee on Coordination and Presentaion of Government Policy
2–4

Ministerial policy advisors
Deputy Prime Minister 124w

Ministerial statements
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 429–42
Electronic government (03.03.97) 625–36
Government information services (03.03.97) 625–36
London Underground (25.02.97) 149–65
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1023–35

Ministers
Accountability 623w

Ministers' domestic visits
Business 64w, 618–9w, 704w

Ministers' visits abroad
Hong Kong 314w, 483w, 487–8w
Qatar 57–8w
Scottish Office 455–6w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food
Age 77–8w
Billing 748w
Cash limits 278w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food—continued
Civil service agencies 512w
Consultants 78w
Contracts for services 512–3w
Employment agencies 321–2w
Operating costs 748w
Parliamentary questions 194w
Scottish Grand Committee 80w
Theft 322w
Veterinary services 685–6w

Ministry of Defence
Age 488w
Billing 711w
Civil service agencies 118w
Contracts for services 256–7w
Employment agencies 105–6w
Parliamentary questions 590w
Private finance initiative 710–1w
Publicity 101–2w
Scottish Grand Committee 107w
Theft 371–8w

Miscarriages of justice
Compensation 698w

Missing persons
Inter agency cooperation 142–3

Mitchell, Mr Andrew, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Social Security
Questions
Child benefit, Sixth form education 200w
Child Support Agency, Administrative delays 82w
Child Support Agency, Advertising 83w
Child Support Agency, Debts 198–9w
Child Support Agency, Fraud 198w
Child Support Agency, Stress related illnesses 198w
Disability living allowance 209–10w
Disability working allowance 88w
Disability working allowance, Earnings rules 88w
Family credit, Maintenance 530w
Lone parents, Child care 140–1
Lone parents, Employment schemes 200w
Maintenance, Children 82–5w, 139–40, 198w
Pensioners, Personal income 201w
Social security benefits, Departmental coordination 197–8w
Theft, Dept of Social Security 717w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Questions
BBC, Digital television 499w
Constitutions, Jersey 132w
EC internal trade 481w
Economic and monetary union 490w
Employment opportunities 262w
European communities, Publicity 56–7w
Fishing quotas 1006
Habanako, Y 179w
Inflation 236w, 615w
Inflation, Economic forecasting 615w
Law of war, Departmental publications 403w
Official engagements 320w
Securities and Investments Board 18w
Trade competitiveness, Manufacturing industries 9–10

Mitchell, Sir David
Debates etc.
Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order (05.03.97) 980–1
Questions
Maintenance, Children 139–40
Training and work experience scheme, St Helena 413w

Moate, Sir Roger
Debates etc.
Business question time intervention (27.02.97) 445
Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (03.03.97) 648–51

Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Debates etc.
Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order (05.03.97) 967–71
Questions
Northern Ireland government 420–1
Rating revaluations, Northern Ireland 333w

Monetary policy
615w

Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Debates etc.
Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (26.02.97) 383
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 718, 732–5
National Heritage Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 202
Questions
Dumfries and Galloway Health Board, Finance 646w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 899
Hunterston B, Radiation hazards 905
Lockerbie, Bombings 883
Mentally disadvantaged, Scotland 45w

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Questions
Family benefits 131–2
Youth unemployment, Northern Ireland 422

Morgan, Mr Rhodri
Debates etc.
Wales (27.02.97) 457, 513–9, 522
Welsh Development Agency Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.97) 800–4, 806
Questions
Antibiotics, Prescriptions 72w, 92w
Death rate 237w, 303–5w
European Council, Cardiff 389w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, European Council 314w
General practitioners 383w
General practitioners, Wales 388–90w
Influenza, Vaccination 73–4w, 382–3w, 388w
Millennium, Wales 500w
NHS trusts, Private finance initiative 449–50w
Prescriptions, Fraud 91–2w, 388w, 447w, 449w

Morley, Mr Elliot
Questions
Animal quarantine, Codes of practice 194w, 326–7w
Export of live animals 76–8w, 327w
Export of live animals, Kent 747–8w
Export of live animals, Pigs 329w
Export of live animals, Sheep 748w
Fishing quotas 1012
Hedges and ditches 729–30w
Parasitic diseases, Research 328w
Patents, Genetic engineering 481w
Sheep diseases, Disease control 675w
Sheep scab 327–8w

Morris, Rt Hon Alfred
Debates etc.
Education (Special Educational Needs) Bill (HL), Points of order (28.02.97) 595–6

Morris, Rt Hon Alfred—continued
NHS (24.02.97) 44–8
Questions
Council housing finance 461–2w
Estates renewal challenge fund, Manchester 297–8w
Gulf war syndrome, Compensation 253w
Gulf war syndrome, Organophosphorous pesticides 709–10w
Haemophilia, Factor VIII 659w
Housing and handicapped, Building regulations 601–2w
Organophosphate Pesticide Investigation Team 253w
Organophosphorous pesticides 707w
Retirement pensions 202–3w
War pensions, Ear disorders 398w
War pensions, Iraq-Kuwait conflict 719w

Mortgage relief
493w
Scotland 138w

Morwenstowe
Military intelligence 59w

Moss, Mr Malcolm, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office
Debates etc.
Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order (05.03.97) 993–5
Hospitals, Northern Ireland (05.03.97) 824, 832–6
Questions
Electorate, Northern Ireland 664w
Environmental audit, Northern Ireland Office 99–100w
Hazardous materials, Northern Ireland Office 239–40w
Hospital patients, Weather 508–10w
Housing, Northern Ireland 580w
Housing construction, Carrickfergus 243w, 335–6w
Incapacity benefit, Northern Ireland 97–9w
Local plans, Down and Newry 240–1w
Nature reserves, Northern Ireland 244w
Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service 185w
Northern Ireland Housing Council 579w
Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Contracts for services 574w
Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Finance 574w
Northern Ireland Water Service Agency, Manpower 574–8w
Public sector housing, Belfast 184w
Public sector housing, Northern Ireland 573w, 579w
Road accidents, Comber 96w
Road traffic control, Local authority powers 511w
Road works, Northern Ireland 579–80w
Tipping of waste, Magheramorne 245w

Mothers
Welfare foods 519–20w

Motor vehicle safety
Lorries 502w

Motor vehicles
Excise duties 406w

Motorways
Road length 54–5w
Scotland 390–1w
Wales 387w

Mourne
Local plans 240–1w

Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 954–6
Questions
Northern Ireland government 416
Northern Ireland Parades Commission 421–2

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 439
Questions
Indonesia, Human rights 56w
King, Fiona, Criminal appeals 708w
Kyle, David, Criminal appeals 708w
Languages education, Primary education 266w
Police interrogation, Northern Ireland 332w

Multiple occupation
Council tax 299w

Multiple sclerosis
Research finance 439–40w

Museums and galleries
Army 106–7w
Capital investment 497–8w

MV Braer
Oil pollution 231w, 418w

MV Cap Afrique
329w

MV Sea Empress
Oil pollution 49–50w
Salvage 50w

Mynott, James
Prisoner escapes 213w

National Audit Office
81w

National Bus Company
Privatisation 419w

National Heritage Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 198–211
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475

National income
496–7w
Accounting 489–90w

National insurance contributions
201–2w, 308–9w
Jobseeker's allowance 313w
Wales 309w

National Lottery
145–6w, 272–3w, 498–9w, 501w, 615–9
Crewe 624w
Cultural heritage (25.02.97) 198–211
Disaster relief 611
South Bank Centre 614–5
Sports 274w, 625w
Worcestershire 498w

National Meat Hygiene Service
see Meat Hygiene Service

National Savings Agency
306–7w

NATO
(26.02.97) 257–76, 487w, 712w

Nature conservation
Airlines 533–5w
Clones 571w
Hedges and ditches 744w
Set-aside schemes 745w

Nature reserves
Northern Ireland 244w

Naval bases
Plymouth 371w

Navy
105w

Nazi war crimes
(28.02.97) 594
Prosecutions 392w
Scotland 392w

Needham, Rt Hon Richard,
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 936–41

Negligence
Scottish health boards 45–6w

Nelson, Mr Anthony, Minister for Trade
Questions
Antidumping duties 472–8w
Antidumping duties, Office equipment 472w
Arms trade 478–9w
EC internal trade 481w
European Commission, Billing 619w
Insurance companies 250–1w
Internal Market Advisory Committee, Complaints 223–5w
International trade, Cuba 61w
Overseas investment 60w
Overseas trade, Albania 63w
Single Market Compliance Unit 64w
Wood, Exports 620w

Neubert, Sir Michael
Questions
Employment, EC countries 333
Marriage 505–6w
Millennium Exhibition 497w
Millennium Exhibition, Water transport 124w

New Parliamentary Building
Construction costs 222w

Newham
Dockyards 694–5

Newport Gwent
Disability appeal tribunals 642w

Newton, Rt Hon Tony, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Debates etc.
Business statements (27.02.97) 443–53, (06.03.97) 1036–45
Drug abuse resistance education programme, Nottinghamshire (26.02.97) 401–2
Gulf war syndrome, Points of order (27.02.97) 456
Questions
Environmental audit, Lord President of the Council 13–4w
Hazardous materials, Lord President of the Council 14w
House of Commons questions, Scotland 20–1w
Members' travel, Costs 167–8w
Northern Ireland Grand Committee 167w
Oral questions 540–1w
Parliamentary questions, Costs 392w

Newtownards
Integrated schools 95w
School population 95w

Next steps initiative
123w

NHS
706–8
Audit 267–8w
Building repairs 519w
North West region 67w
Opposition days (24.02.97) 22–121

NHS Executive
Finance 69–70w

NHS finance
519w
Greater London 741–2w
Scotland 896–8
Wales 277w

NHS internal market
382w

NHS trusts
Debts 180w
Private finance initiative 449–50w, 569w
Scotland 43w
Wales 449–50w

Nicholls, Mr Patrick
Questions
Beef, Exports 1014–5
NHS finance, Scotland 896–7

Nicholson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Political refugees (05.03.97) 839
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1030
Questions
Acute beds 656w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Hormone treatments 568w
Food hygiene, Charities 79–80w
Hill farming, Agricultural subsidies 741–2w
Housing benefits 281w
Job security 320
Legal opinion, European Court of Human Rights 319–20w
Limitation of actions 319w
National Lottery 145–6w
Nurses, Manpower 734w
Office of Fair Trading, Brewing industry 583w
Personal Investment Authority 16w
Personal pensions, Marketing 15–6w
Road traffic control 545w
Road traffic control, Research 545–6w
Social security claims 85–6w
Telephone tapping, Admissibility of evidence 603–4w

Nicholson, Miss Emma
Questions
Deportation 605–6w
Overseas aid 15–6

Night flying
Low flying 107–8w

Nimrod aircraft
Aircrew 114w
Canada 114–5w

Nitrate sensitive areas
155–6w

Nitrogen oxides
Air pollution 600w

Noise
220–1w, 601w, 734w
EC action (25.02.97) 247

Non-departmental public bodies
Freemasonry 725w

Non-domestic rates
Scotland 644–5w

Non-Domestic Rating (Chargeable Amounts for Small Hereditaments) Amendment Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 679

Non-fossil fuel obligation
300w

Non-metropolitan counties
730w

Norchem
Recycling 594w

Norris, Mr Steve,
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 157
Questions
London Underground, Privatisation 145–6

North Ayrshire
Economic situation 644w

North East region
EC grants and loans 619w
Fisheries 323w

North Lincolnshire District Council
Taxis 550w

North London railway line
272w

North Review
see Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review

North Sea
Air traffic control 545w
Fishing quotas 743w

North West region
NHS 67w

Northamptonshire
Housing benefits 87w

Northern Electric
Shareholders 59–60w

Northern Ireland
Action for community employment 333w, 411–3, 659–60w
Airport tax 329w, 535w
Beef 329w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 93–5w, 329w
Civil disorder 239w
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools 336w, 511w
Crimes of violence 413, 660w
Death 241–3w
Disability living allowance 97–9w
Education (03.03.97) 679
Educational finance 417–8, 509–11w
Educational standards 417
Election offences 99w
Electoral register 330w, 334–6w
Electorate 95–6w, 245w, 664w
Electricity interconnectors 331w
Ethnic groups 100w
Farm and countryside enhancement scheme 95w
Food inspection 660–1w
Fowl pest 101w, 659w, 722–3w
Gaelic language 100–1w
Hard core unemployed 329–30w
Hospital patients 508–10w
Hospitals (05.03.97) 817–36
Housing 580w
Incapacity benefit 97–9w
Legislation 334w
Local authority powers 332–3w
Local government finance 664w
Millennium 330w
Nature reserves 244w

Northern Ireland*—*continued
Police interrogation 332w
Private finance initiative 580–1w
Public appointments 721w
Public expenditure (05.03.97) 961–95
Public sector housing 573w, 579w
Rating revaluations 333w
Riot control weapons 721w
Road traffic control 511w
Road works 579–80w
Teachers 336w
Terrorism 183–4w, 330w, 332–3w, (05.03.97) 917–59
Veterinary medicine 662–3w
Youth unemployment 422–3

Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475

Northern Ireland Dept of Economic Development
Efficiency scrutinies 399w

Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service
185w

Northern Ireland Forum
420

Northern Ireland government
329w, 332w, 413–6, 418–21, 706
Sinn Fein 330w

Northern Ireland Grand Committee
167w

Northern Ireland Housing Council
579w

Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Contracts for services 574w
Finance 574w

Northern Ireland Office
Agricultural research 661–4w, 723–4w
Billing 722w
Civil service agencies 185w
Environmental audit 99–100w
Hazardous materials 239–40w
Parliamentary questions 240w
Private finance initiative 721–2w
Public expenditure 243–4w
Religious discrimination 511–2w
Scottish Grand Committee 100w
Theft 509–10w
Veterinary services 662w

Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review
334w, 413–4

Northern Ireland Parades Commission
333w, 421–2

Northern Ireland Water Service Agency
Manpower 574–8w

Northumbrian Water
Shareholders 59–60w

Nottingham
Sexual offences 697w

Nottinghamshire
Drug abuse resistance education programme (26.02.97) 397–410, 705w

Nuclear power
Scotland 909–10

Nuclear power stations
Decommissioning 478w

Nuclear submarines
Decommissioning 188w
Defence expenditure 109w
Operating costs 113w

Nuclear submarines*—*continued
Radioactive waste disposal 113w, 255–6w

Nuclear weapons
Defence expenditure 117–8w
Russia 588w

Nuclear weapons tests
Exservicemen 402–3w, 717–8w

Nurses
183w
Manpower 734–5w

Nurses' training
Student numbers 441w
Student wastage 445w

Nutrition and health
Scotland 649–52w, 689w

O'Brien, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 344–51, 354, 366
Questions
Chancery plc, Company liquidations 703w
Pig diseases 573w

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 70
Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (03.03.97) 643, 651–4
Questions
Local authority powers, Northern Ireland 332–3w
Ministerial Committee on Coordination and Presentaion of Government Policy 2–3
Overseas aid 14–5
School transport 260w

Ocean Wave 97
102–5w

Offences against children
463–4w

Offenders
Legal costs 505w

Offensive weapons
604–5w

Office equipment
Antidumping duties 472w

Office for Standards in Education
706w

Office of Fair Trading
Brewing industry 583w

Office of Science and Technology
Agricultural research 620–1w
Research finance 620w

Office of the President of Social Security Appeal Tribunals
see Social Security appeal tribunals

Official engagements
156w, 320w, 545w, 706w

Official gifts
Albania 156w, 314w

Offshore structures
Scotland 233–4w

O'Hara, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Cyprus (03.03.97) 687–9
Questions
Local government finance 594w

Oil industry
EC law 583–4w

Oil pollution
MV Braer 231w, 418w
MV Sea Empress 49–50w
Pollution monitoring 246w

Oil prices
616–7w

Older workers
559w

Olner, Mr Bill
Questions
Excise duties, Motor vehicles 406w
Motorways, Road length 54–5w
Motorways, Scotland 390–1w
Motorways, Wales 387w
Personal pensions, Tax allowances 135w, 707–8w
Standard spending assessments, Warwickshire 704
State earnings related pension scheme 208–9w, 642w

Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Questions
Fisheries, North East region 323w
Food labelling 1007
Internal Market Advisory Committee, Complaints 223–5w
Rodents, Poisoning 195w
Salmon, Republic of Ireland 321w
Single Market Compliance Unit 64w
Spain 57w

Open government
8

Opencast mining
595w
Planning appeals 700–1

***Oppenheim, Mr Phillip**, Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury*
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 343–4, 348–9, 364–7
Questions
Airlines, Nature conservation 533–5w
Airport tax, Tax yields 535w
Customs and Excise, Criminal proceedings 406–7w
EC grants and loans, Republic of Ireland 408w
Excise duties, Motor vehicles 406w
Hydrocarbon oil duties, Environmental policy 405–6w
Prices, EC countries 612–4w
Smuggling, Firearms 535–6w
UK contributions to EC budget 614–5w
UN Conference on Environment and Development, Treasury 707w
VAT, Building repairs 405w

Opposition days
NHS (24.02.97) 22–121

Oral contraceptives
266w

Oral questions
540–1w

Organic food
1008–9

Organophosphate Pesticide Investigation Team
253w

Organophosphorous pesticides
707w
Gulf war syndrome 252–3w, 587–8w, 709–10w
Research 154w

***Ottaway, Mr Richard**, Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury*
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1124

Overdoses
73w, 738w

Overseas aid
14–6, 75w, 151w, 301–2w
Agricultural production 542–3w
Albania 702w
Brazil 13
Children 75w
Contracts 541–2w
Family planning 542w
India 15
Iraq 75w
Latin America 13
South Africa 393w

Overseas investment
60w

Overseas students
Immigration rules 291w

Overseas trade
Albania 63w
Iran 484w

Paedophilia
132w
Scotland 450–1w

***Page, Mr Richard**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Company Accounts (Disclosure of Directors Emoluments) Regulations (03.03.97) 669
Questions
Electric cables 61w
Energy prices, EC countries 168–70w
Non-fossil fuel obligation 300w
Northern Electric, Shareholders 59–60w
Nuclear power stations, Decommissioning 478w
Oil industry, EC law 583–4w
Oil pollution, Pollution monitoring 246w
Public contracts, VAT 472w
Small businesses, Trade competitiveness 59–60w

***Paice, Mr James**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment*
Questions
Apprentices 338–68w
Astra Holdings, Pension funds 30–1w
Bournemouth, Dept for Education and Employment 148–9w
Employment, EC countries 334–5
Further education, EC grants and loans 337w
Further education, Educational finance 149–50w
International Labour Organisation 30w
Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise Council 29w
Science Technology and Mathematics Council 560w
Sixth form education, Kirklees 553–5w
Sixth form education, School population 555w
Sixth form education, Schools 22–5w
Skill shortages 150w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 29w, 558w
Unemployment 331, 333–4

***Paice, Mr James**—continued*
Unemployment, Cumbria 330–1
Youth unemployment, School leaving 261w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order (05.03.97) 971–6, 993
Questions
Ethnic groups, Northern Ireland 100w
Gaelic language, Northern Ireland 101w
Gaelic language, Schools 100w
Northern Ireland government 414–5
University of Ulster 100w

Pameton
738w

Parachuting
Military vehicles 486w

Parades Commission
see Northern Ireland Parades Commission

Parasitic diseases
Research 328w

Parent plus
143–4

Parents
Handicapped 443–4w

Parliamentary questions
Attorney General 235w
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 618w
Costs 392w
Dept for Education and Employment 262w
Dept of Social Security 208w
Dept of the Environment 596–7w
Dept of Transport 269w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 222–3w
Home Office 432w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 194w
Ministry of Defence 590w
Northern Ireland Office 240w
Prime Minister 320w
Scottish Office 687w
Social Security appeal tribunals 561w
Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee 1016
Treasury 303–4w
Welsh Office 276w

Partnership insurance
445w

Part-time education
Social security benefits rules 279–80w

Part-time employment
Jobseeker's allowance 258–9w

Patents
Genetic engineering 481w

Patients' transport
383w

Patnick, Sir Irvine
Questions
British Academy of Sport 624w
Curriculum 28w
Development aid 150–1w
Local education authorities, Administrative costs 323–4
Overseas aid 301–2w
Schools, Security 337w
Sixth form education, Schools 22–5w
South Yorkshire Supertram 52–3w, 297w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 333w

Patrol craft
Caribbean 486w

Pawsey, Mr James
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 446
Questions
Building regulations, Fees and charges 155w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept of Social Security 278–9w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept of Transport 545w
Immigration controls 223w
Immigration rules, Overseas students 291w
Local education authorities, Administrative costs 324–5
M45, Litter 609w
Mining, Pollution control 219–20w
Nitrate sensitive areas 155–6w
Standard spending assessments, Warwickshire 704
Wood, Exports 620w

Pay beds
68–9w

Pay deductions
Prisoners of war 120w

Peace keeping operations
Armed forces deployment 617–8w

Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 448
Questions
Bombings, Manchester 298w
Opencast mining, Planning appeals 701

Pearson, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
National Lottery (Reorganisation) Bill, 1R (26.02.97) 338–40
Questions
First aid, Curriculum 556w
Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981, Schools 600–1w
School buildings, Building repairs 260w

Pendry, Mr Tom
Questions
Fishing 612

Pension funds
Astra Holdings 30–1w
Taxation 307w

Pension rights
Divorce settlements 285w

Pensioners
Income support 136–8, 562w
Personal income 201w, 284–6w, 525–6w
Standard of living 311–2w

Pensions
89–90w, 719w
Clergy 65w
EC countries 88–9w
Vincent, Reg (26.02.97) 311–8

Pensions Act 1995
Questions
145w

Performance appraisal
Teachers 898–9

Perinatal mortality
16–7w

Personal income
134w
Pensioners 201w, 284–6w, 525–6w

Personal Investment Authority
16w

Personal pensions
201w

***Personal pensions**—continued*
Marketing 15–6w, 307w
Tax allowances 135w, 707–8w

Pesca initiative
Berwickshire 35–6w

Pescado
see MFV Pescado

Pest control
Birds 298w, 572w

Petrol alternatives
Exhaust emission controls 53w

Physics
Higher education 557w

Pig diseases
573w
Germany 747w

Pigmeat
Health hazards 738w

Pigs
Export of live animals 329w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 1013–4
Deferred pensions 145w
Deregulation initiative, Small businesses 6
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 414w
Employment service local offices, Vacancies 469–70w
Graduates, Take-up of employment 628w
Incapacity benefit 639w
Jobseeker's allowance 563w, 641w
Jobseeker's allowance, Social security appeals 718w
Pre-school education, Lancashire 625–6w
Railway land 502w
Romania, Know-how Fund 14
Single regeneration budget, Lancashire 600w
Social fund 640w
Social fund, Administrative costs 562w
Social rented housing, Lancashire 466w
South Africa, Foreign trade 393w
South Africa, Overseas aid 393w
Stress related illnesses 736w
Student loans 626–7w
Student Loans Company, Privatisation 627w
Student numbers 470w, 630w
Tourism, Government grants 614

Pinderfields Hospital NHS Trust
519w

Pipeline inspection notification system
585–6w

Planning appeals
Opencast mining 700–1

Planning (Consequential Provisions) (Scotland) Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* and rem stages* (25.02.97) 197
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475

Planning (Hazardous Substances) (Scotland) Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* and rem stages* (25.02.97) 197
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475

Planning Inspectorate
Performance standards 469w
Wales 469w

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Bill (HL) 1996/97

***Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Bill (HL) 1996/97**—continued*
Debates etc.
2R*, money res* and rem stages (25.02.97) 196–7
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475

Planning permission
Tipping of waste 599w

Plastic surgery
Breasts 70w

Plymouth
Millennium Commission 613
Naval bases 371w

Pneumonia
Death 615–6w

Poisoning
Rodents 195w

Police
699–700w
Civil servants' secondment 433–4w
Recruitment 698w
Scotland 157w

Police and Firemen's Pensions Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Ref to 2R Com (25.02.97) 165

Police Bill (HL) 1996/97
Questions
463w

Police custody
Death 129w, 437w

Police equipment
Chemical weapons 3w

Police informers
133w

Police (Insurance of Voluntary Assistants) Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* (28.02.97) 596
Money res* (05.03.97) 996

Police interrogation
Northern Ireland 332w

Police national computer
Sexuality 463w

Police stations
Easterhouse 225w

Police training
Indonesia 75–6w

Political refugees
(05.03.97) 837–58
Social security benefits 138–9
Sri Lanka 2–3w

Pollution control
Mining 219–20w

Pollution monitoring
Oil pollution 246w

Pop stars
619

Porter, Mr David
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 90–4
Questions
Residential care, Suffolk 568–9w

***Portillo, Rt Hon Michael**, Secretary of State for Defence*
Questions
Ministers' visits abroad, Hong Kong 487–8w

Post codes
Scottish Office 389–90w

Powell, Sir Ray
Debates etc.
Wales (27.02.97) 492–5, 500
Questions
New Parliamentary Building, Construction costs 222w

Powell, Mr William
Questions
Housing benefits, Northamptonshire 87w
Unemployment 14–5w

Power stations
Deeside 278w, 448w

Prentice, Mrs Bridget
Questions
Hard core unemployed 559w
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review 334w

Prentice, Mr Gordon
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 450–1
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 163
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1033
Questions
Animal diseases, Compensation 682w
Armed forces medical services, Hospitals 385–6w
Assisted places scheme, Lancashire 555w
Bankruptcy 703–4w
Breasts, Plastic surgery 70w
Coastguard Agency, Annual reports 610w
Dental services 66–7w
Dental services, Manpower 65–6w
Departmental coordination 124w
Duff, William 452w
Educational finance, Buckinghamshire 553w
Food hygiene 681w
London Underground, Loans 418w
London Underground, Privatisation 147–8
Multiple sclerosis, Research finance 439–40w
Nature conservation, Clones 571w
Sea pollution 611w

Pre-school education
Age participation rates 414w
Cardiff 449w
Education vouchers 265–6w, 335–6, 414w, 450w, 899
Lancashire 625–6w
Leeds 626w
Scotland 41–3w
Waltham Forest 626w

Prescott, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (27.02.97) 426
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1048–50, 1052, 1054, 1056–74, 1078, 1111
Questions
European communities, Information services 5

Prescription drugs
735w
Deviance and behaviour disorders 736w

Prescriptions
Antibiotics 72w, 92w
Fraud 91–2w, 388w, 447w, 449w
Private patients 569w
Wales 91–2w, 388w, 449w

Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order 1997

Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order 1997—continued
Debates etc.
(05.03.97) 917–59

Primary education
415–7w
Class sizes 259w, 327–9
Educational standards 30w
Languages education 266w
Rutland 25–6w

Primates
Animal experiments (25.02.97) 165

Prime Minister
Parliamentary questions 320w
Scottish Grand Committee 1w

Prince's Trust
Civil servants 222w

Prison accommodation
Belmarsh Prison 289w

Prison education services
Belmarsh Prison 429w

Prison population
Ethnic groups 213w
Scotland 648–50w

Prison rules
434w

Prison sentences
Homicide 697–8w
Scotland 523w
Young offenders 695–6w

Prison staff
Category C prisoners 606w

Prison visits
Category A prisoners 289w
Drug crimes 437–8w
Legal profession 288–9w
Video recordings 288–9w

Prisoner escapes
Mynott, James 213w
Whitemoor Prison 428–9w, 694w

Prisoners
Army in Northern Ireland 331w, 403–4w
Childbirth 435–6w
Complaints 214w
Drug abuse 213–4w, 288w, 434–5w
Health 289–90w
Hood, Wayne (05.03.97) 859–66
Medical examinations 428w
Restraint equipment 437w
Video recordings 214–6w, 288w, 428w

Prisoners of war
Pay deductions 120w

Prisoners' release
Belmarsh Prison 700w
Scotland 522–3w

Prisoners' transfers
Immigrant detainees 216w

Prisons
696w
Babies 438w
Construction 436w
Drug seizures 438–9w
Greater London 438–9w
Scotland 522w
Security 694w
Ships 212w, 606w, 698w

Prisons (Alcohol Testing) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Rep* and 3R (28.02.97) 529–51

Private education
Hong Kong Government 314w

Private finance initiative
617w
Dept for Education and Employment 706w
Dept of Health 740w
Dept of Social Security 720w
Dept of the Environment 730–1w
Dept of Trade and Industry 703w
Dept of Transport 713w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 703w
Home Office 699w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 692–3w
Ministry of Defence 710–1w
NHS trusts 449–50w, 569w
Northern Ireland 580–1w
Northern Ireland Office 721–2w
Treasury 408w
Welsh Office 725w

Private hospitals
Accident and emergency departments 657w

Private patients
Hospital consultants 69w
Medical treatments 68w
Prescriptions 569w
Surgery 69w

Privatisation
412w
Administrative costs 138–40w
Advertising 236–7w
Agricultural Development and Advisory Service 748w
Building Research Establishment (27.02.97) 454–5
Central line 546w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 712w
Government research establishments 621–2w
Income 715w
London Underground 144–8, 503–4w, 533w, 547–8w, 715w
National Bus Company 419w
Railfreight Distribution 419w, 713w
Railway transport 51w, 294–6w, 501w, 551w
Rolling stock 418–9w
Shareholders 320w
Student Loans Company 627w

"Privatisation: Setting Enterprise Free"
479–80w

Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 637–58

Professions Supplementary to Medicine (Arts Therapists Board) Order of Council 1997
Debates etc.
(26.02.97) 396

Profit sharing
Tax allowances 137w

Profits taxes
Water charges 148

Project Work
559w

Property law
Scotland 231–2w

Prosecutions
133w, 187–9w
Allcock, Michael 405w
Magistrates' courts 21w
Metrication 171w
Nazi war crimes 392w
Sexual offences 234–5w
Water pollution 153–4w

Prosthetics
739w

Public appointments
4, 124–5w
Committee on Safety of Medicines 517–9w
Dept of National Heritage 300–1w
Northern Ireland 721w

Public contracts
VAT 472w

Public expenditure
(06.03.97) 1047–124
Glasgow 901–2
Northern Ireland (05.03.97) 961–95
Northern Ireland Office 243–4w
Scotland 689w
Wales 386w

Public petitions
Adoptive Mothers (Maternity Leave) Bill 1996/97 (28.02.97) 525
Child abuse (25.02.97) 248
Child prostitution (25.02.97) 248, (03.03.97) 680
Lever Park Bill 1996/97 (25.02.97) 248
Lewisham Hospital (28.02.97) 526
Milk deliveries (03.03.97) 680
Railway safety (04.03.97) 808
Scottish Borders Council (04.03.97) 807

Public relations
Army 487w

Public sector assets
236w

Public sector borrowing requirement
493–4w
Scotland 134w

Public sector housing
595–6w
Belfast 184w
Northern Ireland 573w, 579w
Waltham Forest 728w

Public telephones
Hospitals 74w

Public Works Loan Board
Local authorities 617w

Publicity
Dept of Social Security 81w
Dept of Trade and Industry 177–9w
European communities 56–7w
Ministry of Defence 101–2w
Road Traffic (New Drivers) Act 1995 501–2w
Scottish Office 163–5w
Self-assessment of tax 494–5w

Pupil exclusions
263w
Clwyd 447w

Qatar
Ministers' visits abroad 57–8w

Quantock School
Armed forces education allowances 117w

Rabies
514w, 539w, 569w
Europe 573w

Radiation hazards
Hunterston B 903–9
RAF Greenham Common 587w

Radice, Mr Giles
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 361–2

Radioactive waste disposal
Nuclear submarines 113w, 255–6w
Sellafield 461w

Radioactive wastes
Defence land 590w
Research 466w

Radium
Defence research 586w

RAF Edzell
119w

RAF Feltwell
119w

RAF Greenham Common
Radiation hazards 587w

RAF Menwith Hill
119w
Armed forces officers 119w
Security of tenure 118–9w

RAF Quedgely
Waste disposal 371w

RAF Spadeadam
Armed forces training 113–4w, 116w
Defence equipment 114w

Railfreight Distribution
Privatisation 419w, 713w

Railtrack
Debts written off 611w

Railway land
502w

Railway safety
Channel tunnel 714w
Fences 551–2w, 716–7w
Public petitions (04.03.97) 808

Railway stations
Crime 52w
Millennium Exhibition 269–70w

Railway transport
Privatisation 51w, 294–6w, 501w, 551w

Railway travel
Cairngorms 644w
Tickets 550w

Railway workers
Asbestosis 51–2w
Manpower 713w

Rangeless airborne instrumented debriefing system
115w

Rateable value
Scotland (03.03.97) 679
Sports facilities 301w

Rathbone, Mr Tim
Questions
Army reserves 427
Bulgaria, Know-how Fund 14
Deregulation initiative, Small businesses 5–6
UNESCO 57w

Rating revaluations
Northern Ireland 333w

Raynsford, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Empty housing (25.02.97) 254–5
Standing Order No 20 applications, Building Research Establishment (27.02.97) 454–5
Questions
Building Research Establishment 8w
Council housing, Housing construction 698–9
Foundation for the Built Environment 8w

Raynsford, Mr Nick—continued
Royal Naval College 593w

Recruitment
Police 698w

Recycling
Norchem 594w

Redundancy
British Rail 50–1w

Redundancy pay
Former ministers 11

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
NATO (26.02.97) 263–5, 272
Questions
Hong Kong, Gold and foreign exchange reserves 483w
UK contributions to EC budget 614–5w

Refreshment Dept
Beer 540w

Refugees
Germany 223w

Reg(EEC)2080/92
(03.03.97) 679

Reg(EC)2223/96
489–90w

Regional electricity companies
Ownership 10–1

Regional selective assistance
622w
West Midlands 172–3w

Registrar General
(03.03.97) 679

Regulation of Diet Industry Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 594

Rehabilitation of offenders
211–2w

Reid, Dr John
Questions
EC grants and loans, Scotland 884–5

Religious discrimination
Northern Ireland Office 511–2w

Religious education
329–30

Rendel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 945–7
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 1005
Education Reform Act 1988 558w
Enborne Lodge School Newbury 557–8w
Maintenance, Children 139

Rendering industry
Government grants 683–4w

Rents
Armed forces housing 369–70w, 403w
London Underground 549w

Rents to mortgages scheme
595w

Repossession orders
Scotland 158–60w

Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 659–64

Republic of Ireland
EC grants and loans 408w
Salmon 321w

Rescue services
610–1w

Research councils
Government grants 252w

Research finance
Institute of Food Research 293w
Medical research 176w
Multiple sclerosis 439–40w
Office of Science and Technology 620w

Residential care
Coventry 180w, 267–8w
Suffolk 568–9w

Residential Homes Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 594

Resignations
Doctors 657w

Restraint equipment
Prisoners 437w

Retail prices index
Government contracts 222w

Retirement pensions
202–3w, 564w, 1017–8
Social security benefits uprating 133–5
Wales 720w

Revenue support grant
Scotland 644w

Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(04.03.97) 714–67

Richards, Mr Rod,
Debates etc.
Wales (27.02.97) 458, 472, 474, 483–8, 497, 503, 516
Questions
Arts sponsorship 616
Bron Dyffryn Special School 468w
Concessionary television licences, Wales 396w
EC grants and loans, Republic of Ireland 408w
Health authorities, Finance 727w
Housing for Wales, Loans 727–8w
Income tax, Wales 407w, 497w
International Fund for Agricultural Development, UK contributions 302w
National insurance contributions, Wales 309w
Public expenditure, Wales 386w
Retirement pensions, Wales 720w
Tax yields, Wales 387w
Teachers, Early retirement 417–8w
Unemployment, Wales 710

Riddick, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 439
Business questions (06.03.97) 1041–2
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1064
Questions
Class sizes, Primary education 328
Northern Ireland government 332w

Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Questions
Hong Kong, Ministers' visits abroad 314w, 483w
McAliskey, Roisin, Extradition 147–8w
Military intelligence, Morwenstowe 59w

Right to buy
Scotland 36–7w, 44–5w

Right to Work Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 596

Ringway Parliamentary Support Group
734w

Riot control weapons
463w
Northern Ireland 721w

River Tay
Flood control 645–6w

Rivers
Water abstraction 598w

Riyadh
Government buildings 404w

Road accidents
Comber 96w
Drugs 4w, 48–9w

Road construction
Demonstrations 85–6w

Road length
Motorways 54–5w

Road signs
54w
Scotland 391w

Road tax
Fraud 546–7w

Road traffic
Wilford (04.03.97) 809–16

Road traffic control
545w
Local authority powers 511w
Northern Ireland 511w
Research 545–6w

Road Traffic (New Drivers) Act 1995
Questions
Publicity 501–2w

Road Traffic Reduction Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Rep* and 3R (28.02.97) 575–90

Road works
609w
M25 142w
Northern Ireland 579–80w

Roads
607–10w

Robathan, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Civil Actions (Limit on Proceedings) Bill, 1R (05.03.97) 914–6
Questions
Child Support Agency, Fraud 198w
Railway travel, Cairngorms 644w

Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 216–7, 227–8
Wales (27.02.97) 468, 476–9
Questions
Arts sponsorship 616
Average earnings 496w
Consumer expenditure, Wales 140–1w

Robertson, Mr George
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 724–32
Oral question time intervention (05.03.97) 897

Robertson, Mr George—continued
Questions
Council tax, Scotland 887
Hunterston B, Radiation hazards 903–5
NHS finance, Scotland 898

Robertson, Mr Raymond S, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Debates etc.
Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 768–9, 771, 773, 779, 786, 789–90
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 759
Questions
Animal experiments, Scotland 687–8w
Assisted places scheme, Scotland 654–6w
Central Science Laboratory, Agricultural research 652–3w
Central Veterinary Laboratory, Scientists 654w
Class sizes, Scotland 38w
Cost per pupil, Scotland 899–901
Council house waiting lists, Scotland 43w
Countryside premium scheme, Scotland 41w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 899
Educational assessment, Scotland 582–3w
Educational finance, Scotland 41–2w, 900
Educational policy, Scotland 899
Educational standards, Scotland 899
Farms, Scotland 37w
Further education, Scotland 582w
Homelessness, Rural areas 688w
Homelessness, Scotland 232–3w
Institute of Food Research, Scientists 653w
Leasehold housing, Scotland 232w
Nutrition and health, Scotland 689w
Offshore structures, Scotland 233–4w
Pre-school education, Scotland 41–3w
Right to buy, Scotland 36–7w, 44–5w
Salmon, Scotland 581–2w, 894–6
Science and technology research, Government grants 581w
Scottish Office, Agricultural research 652–3w, 690–1w
Scottish Office, Veterinary services 653–4w
Slaughterhouses, Inspections 652w
Slums, Scotland 35w
Teachers, Performance appraisal 898–9
Teachers, Scotland 645w
Voluntary organisations, Glasgow 581w
Voluntary organisations, Scotland 581w

Robinson, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 632
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1031
Questions
Food 744w
Grant maintained schools, Performance standards 258w
Handicapped, Discrimination 141–2
Legal aid scheme 620–1
Local government finance 8–9w
Organic food 1008
Sports, Young people 608
Sports facilities, Rateable value 301w

Robinson, Mr Peter D
Debates etc.
Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order (05.03.97) 990–2

Rochdale
County courts 691w

Roche, Mrs Barbara
Questions
Business, Ministers' domestic visits 64w, 704w
Deregulation initiative 166–7w

Rochester Prison
Immigrant detainees 603w

Rock characterisation facility
Sellafield 464–5w, 728w

Rodents
Poisoning 195w

Roe, Mrs Marion
Questions
Income support, Pensioners 137

Rolling stock
Privatisation 418–9w

Roll-on roll-off ships
Shipping safety 609w, 714w

Romania
Know-how Fund 14

Rooker, Mr Jeff
Debates etc.
Business question time intervention (27.02.97) 448
Business questions (27.02.97) 444–5
Oral question time intervention (27.02.97) 424

Rooney, Mr Terry
Questions
British Academy of Sport 499w
Jobseeker's allowance 337–8w
Jobseeker's allowance, National insurance contributions 313w
Jobseeker's allowance, Social security abuse 313w

Ross, Mr William
Debates etc.
Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order (05.03.97) 968, 981–6
Hospitals, Northern Ireland (05.03.97) 826–9
Questions
Crimes of violence, Northern Ireland 660w
Electorate, Northern Ireland 664w
Housing, Northern Ireland 580w
Oil prices 616–7w
Organic food 1008–9
Private finance initiative 617w
Private finance initiative, Northern Ireland 580–1w
Road works, Northern Ireland 579–80w
Youth unemployment, Northern Ireland 422–3

Rosyth Dockyard
Hazardous materials 257w, 586w

Rothiemurchus Estate
Management agreements 687w

Rough sleepers initiative
635–6w

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Questions
Common agricultural policy 1009–10
School discipline 326

Rowlands, Mr Ted
Debates etc.
Wales (27.02.97) 460
Welsh Development Agency Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.97) 794–6, 805–6

Royal Naval College
593w

Royal train
50w

Royal yacht
378w

Ruddock, Ms Joan
Debates etc.
Lewisham Hospital, Public petitions (28.02.97) 526
Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (03.03.97) 656–7

Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 155
NHS (24.02.97) 42

Rural areas
Bus services 546w
Deregulation initiative 122w
Homelessness 688w, 726–7w, 733w
Jobseeker's allowance 262w
Standard spending assessments 703–4

Russia
Nuclear weapons 588w
Seals 425w

Rutland
Primary education 25–6w

Rwanda
Armed forces training 587–8w
Disaster relief 75w

Sackville, Mr Tom, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order (03.03.97) 659, 662
Questions
Absent voting, Election offences 3w, 129–30w
Computer privacy, EC law 540w
Constitutions, Jersey 132w
Coroners 606w
Identity cards 537–8w
Saunders, Philip, Death 538w

Safety belts
Buses 270w

Safety standards
Fireworks 7
Food industry 194–5w
Food microbiology 196–7w

St Asaph Business Park
Foreign investment in UK 726w

St Helena
Training and work experience scheme 413w

Sale of Medicines (Young People) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 594

Salisbury bypass
466–7w, 504–5w, 712–3w

Salmon
Ivermectin 524w, 581–2w
Republic of Ireland 321w
Scotland 524w, 581–2w, 894–6

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1083
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1029
Questions
EC grants and loans, Scotland 46–8w
Economic situation, Scotland 646w

Salmond, Mr Alex—continued
Educational finance, Scotland 900
Gulf war syndrome 426–7
Locate in Scotland 521–2w

Salmonella
Scotland 524w

Salvage
MV Sea Empress 50w

Sanctions
Iraq (28.02.97) 598–606
Libyan Arab Republic (28.02.97) 598–606

Saunders, Philip
Death 538w

Scholarships
Sports 624w

School administration
Sheffield 323–4
Wolverhampton 324

School buildings
Building repairs 260w

School discipline
261w, 325–7
Teacher training 325–6

School Intruders (Criminal Offence) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 596

School leaving
Youth unemployment 261w

School population
Newtownards 95w
Sixth form education 555w

School transport
260w

Schools
Firing ranges 122w, 487w
Gaelic language 100w
Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 600–1w
Humberside 263w
Security 337w
Sheffield 337w
Sixth form education 22–5w

Science and technology
Women's employment 480w

Science and technology research
Contracts of employment 480–1w
Government grants 479w, 581w
Scotland 581w

Science education
GCE A Level 630w

Science Technology and Mathematics Council
560w

Scientists
Agricultural and Food Research Council 482w
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council 482w
Central Veterinary Laboratory 654w, 662–3w, 684–5w
Institute of Food Research 482w, 620w, 653w, 662w

Scope of debate
Speaker's rulings and statements (05.03.97) 963

Scotland
Air routes 43–4w
Air traffic control 141w, 549w
Animal experiments 687–8w
Assisted places scheme 654–6w

Scotland—continued
Capital challenge 889–91
Child abuse 451–2w
Class sizes 38w
Community councils 649w
Convictions 157w
Cost per pupil 899–901
Council house waiting lists 43w
Council tax 886–8
Countryside premium scheme 41w
Crime 157w
Death 226–8w
Dental services 454–5w
Devolution 146–7, 888–9
Domestic energy consumption 635w
EC Committee of the Regions 884–6
EC grants and loans 46–8w, 884–5
Economic situation 646w
Education vouchers 899
Educational assessment 582–3w, 898–9
Educational finance 38–42w, 900
Educational policy 899
Educational standards 899
Elderly (26.02.97) 277–96
Electorate 231w
Electronic tagging 391w, 646w
Employment 644w
Farms 37w
Festivals and special occasions 888
Flood control 645w
Food inspection 652w
Food poisoning 523–4w
Further education 582w, 689w
Hazardous materials (25.02.97) 197
Health service staff 35w
Health services 646w
Homelessness 232–3w, 688w
Hormone treatments 234w
Hospices 891
Hospital beds 37–8w
Hospital patients 229–30w
House of Commons questions 20–1w
Income tax 646w
Leasehold housing 232w
Legal advice and assistance (26.02.97) 396
Legal aid 157–8w
Legal aid scheme (26.02.97) 396
Listed buildings (25.02.97) 196–7
Local authorities 688w
Local government expenditure 645w
Local government finance 645w, (04.03.97) 714–67
Local government revenue 160–2w
Medical treatments 228–9w
Mentally disadvantaged 45w
Mortgage relief 138w
Motorways 390–1w
Nazi war crimes 392w
NHS finance 896–8
NHS trusts 43w
Non-domestic rates 644–5w
Nuclear power 909–10
Nutrition and health 649–52w, 689w
Offshore structures 233–4w
Paedophilia 450–1w
Police 157w
Pre-school education 41–3w
Prison population 648–50w
Prison sentences 523w
Prisoners' release 522–3w
Prisons 522w
Property law 231–2w
Public expenditure 689w
Public sector borrowing requirement 134w
Rateable value (03.03.97) 679
Repossession orders 158–60w
Revenue support grant 644w
Right to buy 36–7w, 44–5w
Road signs 391w
Salmon 524w, 581–2w, 894–6

Scotland—continued
Salmonella 524w
Science and technology research 581w
Sexual offences 523w
Shipbuilding 643w
Sites of special scientific interest 391w
Slums 35w
Special islands needs allowance 644w
Surgery 44w
Taxation 892–4
Teachers 645w
Town and country planning (25.02.97) 195, 197
Unemployment 643w
Veterinary medicine 654w
Voluntary organisations 581w
Water supply industry 642–3w
Young offenders 523w

Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research
48w

Scott Inquiry
see Arms to Iraq Inquiry

Scottish Ambulance Service
Training 229–31w

Scottish Borders Council
Government grants to local authorities (04.03.97) 807
Public petitions (04.03.97) 807

Scottish Grand Committee
643w
Dept of Social Security 309–10w
Deputy Prime Minister 1w
Home Office 127w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 80w
Ministry of Defence 107w
Northern Ireland Office 100w
Prime Minister 1w
Scottish Office 35w

Scottish health boards
Negligence 45–6w

Scottish islands
Airport tax 535w

Scottish Office
Age 521w
Agricultural research 652–3w, 690–1w
Billing 688–9w
Civil service agencies 225–6w
Ministers' visits abroad 455–6w
Parliamentary questions 687w
Post codes 389–90w
Publicity 163–5w
Scottish Grand Committee 35w
Theft 456–7w
Veterinary services 653–4w

Screening
Breast cancer 657w

Sea Empress
see Sea Empress

Sea Fisheries (Shellfish) (Amendment) Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475

Sea Harrier aircraft
Aircrew 254w

Sea pollution
611w

Seals
Russia 425w

Secondary Care Agency
see Defence Secondary Care Agency

Securities and Investments Board
18w

Security
Prisons 694w
Schools 337w

Security of tenure
RAF Menwith Hill 118–9w
US bases 118–9w

Self-assessment of tax
405w
Publicity 494–5w

Sellafield
Radioactive waste disposal 461w
Rock characterisation facility 464–5w, 728w

Sentencing
Homicide 698w
Sexual offences 603w

Set-aside schemes
Nature conservation 745w

Sex Offenders Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 214–47
Questions
463–4w, 523w

Sexual offences
130–2w, 696–7w
Criminal injuries compensation 131–2w
Disclosure of information 132w
Nottingham 697w
Prosecutions 234–5w
Scotland 523w
Sentencing 603w

Sexuality
Police national computer 463w

Share ownership schemes
614w

Shareholders
Northern Electric 59–60w
Northumbrian Water 59–60w
Privatisation 320w

Shaw, Mr David
Debates etc.
Kent County Council, Points of order (24.02.97) 21
Political refugees (05.03.97) 853–4
Questions
Council housing finance 699–700
Deregulation initiative, Small businesses 7
Government contracts, Retail prices index 222w
Local authorities, Scotland 688w
Local education authorities, Cost per pupil 627–30w
Local government staff 599–600w
Local government staff, Wales 668–71w
National income, Accounting 489–90w
Northern Ireland government 418–9
Prices, EC countries 612–4w
Taxation, Scotland 892

Sheep
Export of live animals 748w

Sheep dipping
48w

Sheep diseases
Disease control 675w

Sheep scab
327–8w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (26.02.97) 322

Sheerman, Mr Barry—continued
Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (03.03.97) 638, 641, 652, 655–6
Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order (03.03.97) 659, 661–2, 664
Questions
Entrust 728–9w
Heath, Edward 144
Non-fossil fuel obligation 300w
Offences against children 463–4w
Parent plus 143–4
School discipline 326
Sexual offences 696–7w
Sexual offences, Nottingham 697w
Sexual offences, Sentencing 603w
Tanks 101w
Tipping of waste 460w
Tipping of waste, Air pollution 460w
Tipping of waste, EC action 459w
Tipping of waste, Methane 459w

Sheffield
School administration 323–4
Schools 337w

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1078–83

***Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian**, Secretary of State for Education and Employment*
Questions
Class sizes, Primary education 327–9
Job security 319–21

Shepherd, Sir Colin
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1017
National insurance contributions 201–2w
Public sector housing 596w
Refreshment Dept, Beer 540w

Shepherd, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 345

Shersby, Sir Michael
Questions
Health service staff, Industrial health and safety 708
London Underground, Privatisation 144

Shipbuilding
Scotland 643w

Shipping accidents
MFV Pescado 296–7w

Shipping safety
Roll-on roll-off ships 609w, 714w

Ships
Prisons 212w, 606w, 698w

Shoeburyness
Firing ranges 251w

Shortage subjects
Teacher training 556–7w

Simpson, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Road traffic, Wilford (04.03.97) 809–14
Questions
Clyde submarine base 117w
Comprehensive test ban treaty 483w
Conference on disarmament 483w
Death, Northern Ireland 241–3w
Death, Scotland 227–8w
Death, Wales 667w, 724w
Death, Weather 226w, 490–1w, 665–6w
Death rate 491–2w

Simpson, Mr Alan—continued
Devonport Dockyard, Hazardous materials 586w
Food imports 743w
Hospital patients, Weather 229–30w, 440–1w, 508–10w
Medical treatments, Weather 228–9w, 440–1w, 665–6w
Nuclear submarines, Decommissioning 188w
Nuclear submarines, Defence expenditure 109w
Nuclear submarines, Operating costs 113w
Nuclear submarines, Radioactive waste disposal 113w, 255–6w
Rosyth Dockyard, Hazardous materials 257w, 586w
Standard spending assessments 705

Sims, Sir Roger
Debates etc.
Business questions (06.03.97) 1038
Questions
Pension rights, Divorce settlements 285w

Single Market Compliance Unit
64w

Single people
Housing benefits 200–1w

Single regeneration budget
Lancashire 600w
Waltham Forest 598–9w

Sinn Fein
Northern Ireland government 330w

Sites of special scientific interest
Scotland 391w

Sixth form education
Child benefit 200w
Kirklees 553–5w
School population 555w
Schools 22–5w

Skeet, Sir Trevor
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 628

Skill shortages
150w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Business questions (06.03.97) 1039
Electronic government (03.03.97) 631
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, Points of order (26.02.97) 341–2, (28.02.97) 528
Oral question time intervention (26.02.97) 333
Points of order intervention (25.02.97) 164
Questions
Deregulation initiative, Animal feed 6–7
Film industry 610
Income support, Social security recipients 199w
Nuclear power, Scotland 910
Opencast mining 595w

Slaughterhouses
Food hygiene 1018–20
Inspections 652w, 660–1w, 674w, 679–80w
Ministerial statements (06.03.97) 1023–35

Sleep
457–8w

Slums
Scotland 35w

Small businesses
Deregulation initiative 5–7
Trade competitiveness 59–60w

Smith, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 153
Questions
Lorries, Axle weights 50w
Road works 609w
Roads 607–10w
Royal train 50w

Smith, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 22–32, 37–8, 40, 42, 113
Questions
Doctors, Resignations 657w
Hospital admissions 656w
Hospital consultants, Vacancies 514–6w
Hospital waiting lists 268w
Medical research, Research finance 176w
Medical students 630–1w, 704–5w
NHS finance, Greater London 741–2w
Oral contraceptives 266w
Surgery, Hospital admissions 657w

Smith, Sir Dudley
Debates etc.
Hedges and ditches (26.02.97) 305–6, 310

Smith, Mr Llew
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Animal feed 80w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Compensation 195w
Gulf war syndrome, Organophosphorous pesticides 587–8w
Gulf war syndrome, Research 185–6w
Nuclear weapons, Defence expenditure 117–8w
Ocean Wave 97 102–5w
RAF Greenham Common, Radiation hazards 587w
UK contributions to EC budget 18
UN Conference on Environment and Development 695

Smith, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance) Bill, Rep adjourned (28.02.97) 591–2
Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 555, 558–9
Prisons (Alcohol Testing) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 534–5, 546
Questions
Family Law Advisory Board 506–7w

Smuggling
Firearms 535–6w
Import of live animals 190w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order (05.03.97) 966, 972–3, 989–90
Business questions (27.02.97) 450
Hospitals, Northern Ireland (05.03.97) 823–6, 834
NHS (24.02.97) 62, 88–90
Questions
Action for community employment, Northern Ireland 411–2
Lone parents, Child care 141
Taxation, Scotland 893

Soames, Mr Nicholas, Minister of State for Defence
Questions
A30, Armed forces 639w
Age, Ministry of Defence 488w
Air force, Armed forces training 486w
Air traffic control 586–7w

Soames, Mr Nicholas—continued
Apache AH-64 helicopter 108w
Armed forces, Albania 105w
Armed forces, EC law 588–9w
Armed forces, Germany 590w
Armed forces cadets, Armed forces training 636–7w
Armed forces cadets, Finance 254–5w
Armed forces casualties 591–2w
Armed forces civilians 486w
Armed forces education allowances 637w
Armed forces education allowances, Boarding schools 369w
Armed forces education allowances, Quantock School 117w
Armed forces housing, House purchase 404w
Armed forces housing, Rents 369–70w, 403w
Armed forces medical services, Hospitals 385–6w
Armed forces recruitment, Yorkshire and Humberside 106w
Armed forces training 108w, 112w, 116w
Armed forces training, Dumfries and Galloway 109w
Armed forces training, Goose Bay 112w, 637–8w
Armed forces training, Harrogate 638w
Armed forces training, Helicopters 111w, 116w
Armed forces training, Kielder forest 115w
Armed forces training, Rwanda 587–8w
Armed forces training, Stranraer 112–3w
Army, Armed forces deployment 709w
Army, Museums and galleries 106–7w
Army, Public relations 487w
Army in Northern Ireland, Prisoners 403–4w
Army strength 638w
Billing, Ministry of Defence 711w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 371w
Cambridge Military Hospital, Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 710w
Chemical weapons, Arms control 488w
Civil service agencies, Ministry of Defence 118w
Clyde submarine base 117w
Defence costs study 402w
Defence land 109–11w
Defence Secondary Care Agency 186–8w
EC defence policy, France 589–90w
Electronic warfare, Armed forces training 114w
European Court of Human Rights, Findlay, Alexander 485w
Firing ranges, Armed forces training 111w
Firing ranges, Kirkcudbright 111w
Firing ranges, Schools 122w, 487w
Gulf war syndrome, Compensation 253w
Gulf war syndrome, Organophosphorous pesticides 252–3w, 587–8w, 709–10w
Gulf war syndrome, Research 185–6w
Health physics, Compensation 121–2w
Joint Service Command and Staff College 254w, 711–2w
Korean War, Military decorations 118w
Law of war, Departmental publications 403w
Low flying, Military aircraft 107–8w
Low flying, Night flying 107–8w
Military aircraft 112w
Military aircraft, Air accidents 114–5w, 404w, 485w, 589w
Military aircraft, Air safety 487w
Military aircraft, Aircrew 254w
Military Provost Guard Service 709w
Military vehicles, Parachuting 486w
NATO 487w, 712w

Soames, Mr Nicholas—continued
Naval bases, Plymouth 371w
Nimrod aircraft, Aircrew 114w
Nuclear submarines, Defence expenditure 109w
Nuclear submarines, Operating costs 113w
Nuclear submarines, Radioactive waste disposal 113w
Nuclear weapons, Defence expenditure 117–8w
Nuclear weapons, Russia 588w
Nuclear weapons tests, Exservicemen 402–3w
Ocean Wave 97 102–5w
Organophosphate Pesticide Investigation Team 253w
Parliamentary questions, Ministry of Defence 590w
Patrol craft, Caribbean 486w
Pipeline inspection notification system 585–6w
Prisoners of war, Pay deductions 120w
Publicity, Ministry of Defence 101–2w
Radium, Defence research 586w
RAF Edzell 119w
RAF Feltwell 119w
RAF Greenham Common, Radiation hazards 587w
RAF Menwith Hill 119w
RAF Menwith Hill, Armed forces officers 119w
RAF Menwith Hill, Security of tenure 118–9w
RAF Spadeadam, Armed forces training 113–4w, 116w
RAF Spadeadam, Defence equipment 114w
Rangeless airborne instrumented debriefing system 115w
Royal Naval College 593w
Royal yacht 378w
Scottish Grand Committee, Ministry of Defence 107w
Sea Harrier aircraft, Aircrew 254w
Tanks 101w
Territorial Army, Cardiff 257–8w
Tornado aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 113w, 115–6w
United Nations, Medals 593w
US bases, Security of tenure 118–9w

Social Fund
285–6w, 563w, 640w
Administrative costs 562w

Social rented housing
Expenditure 458–60w
Lancashire 466w

Social security abuse
Housing benefits 527–8w
Jobseeker's allowance 313w

Social Security appeal tribunals
Parliamentary questions 561w
Southwark 90w

Social security appeals
718w
Jobseeker's allowance 718w

Social security benefits
208w
Carers 86w
Departmental coordination 197–8w
Expenditure 19w, 86w
Political refugees 138–9

Social Security Benefits Agency
Contracts for services 529–30w, 561w

Social security benefits rules
Housing benefits 527w
Income support 563w
Part-time education 279–80w

Social security benefits uprating
Retirement pensions 133–5

Social security claims
85–6w
Administrative costs 530–2w
Cheshire 564w

Social Security (Jobseeker's Allowance and Mariners' Benefits) (MiscellaneousAmendments) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(03.03.97) 678–9

Social security recipients
Handicap benefits 639–40w
Income support 199w

Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R and money res* (25.02.97) 170–94

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 160
Questions
Defamation, Legal advice and assistance 13w
Northern Ireland government 706
Social security benefits, Departmental coordination 197–8w

South Africa
Foreign trade 393w
Overseas aid 393w

South Bank Centre
National Lottery 614–5

South Wales
Government assistance to industry 275–6w

South West Trains
49w

South Yorkshire Supertram
52–3w, 297w

Southampton International Boat Show Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
3R* (06.03.97) 1005

Southwark
Social Security appeal tribunals 90w

Spain
57w

***Speaker and deputies**, For rulings and statements see separate heading Speaker's rulings and statements*
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (24.02.97) 22, (25.02.97) 214, 232, 239, 241–3, (28.02.97) 591
Conduct of proceedings (24.02.97) 17, 44, 52, 57, 98, (25.02.97) 145, 168, 184, 195–6, 206, 250, 255, (26.02.97) 276, 296, 318, 322, 336, 373, (27.02.97) 429, 446, 500, 519, (28.02.97) 533, 545, 555, 600, (03.03.97) 619, 641, 659, (04.03.97) 706, 719, 725, 730, 744–5, 748, 750, 760, 778, (05.03.97) 836, 848, 858, 896, 908, 925, 936, 938, 943, 992, (06.03.97) 1023, 1027–9, 1045, 1074
Disallowed questions (26.02.97) 327
Orders and regulations motions (26.02.97) 396, (03.03.97) 659, 678–9, (04.03.97) 714
Points of order (24.02.97) 21, 44, (25.02.97) 149, 152, 165, 196, (26.02.97) 337, 341–2, (28.02.97) 528, 554, 595–6, (03.03.97) 636, (04.03.97) 751, 760, 762, (05.03.97) 911–3, (06.03.97) 1046, 1064, 1070, 1083
Private Members' bill orders (28.02.97) 594–6
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475
Standing Order No 20 applications, Building Research Establishment (27.02.97) 455

Speaker's rulings and statements
House of Commons divisions (28.02.97) 527
Members' constituency work (05.03.97) 911–2
Scope of debate (05.03.97) 963
Sub judice (05.03.97) 952–3, 960
Unparliamentary expressions (26.02.97) 322

Spearing, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 352–4, 358–60
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Greater London 520w
Diplomatic service 422–4w
Dockyards, Newham 694–5
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 335–6
London Underground, Finance 502–3w
London Underground, Investment 503w, 549w
London Underground, Performance standards 504w
London Underground, Privatisation 503–4w
Millennium Exhibition, Finance 123w
Rwanda, Disaster relief 75w
Water supply industry, Government grants 464w

"Special Grant Report (Scotland) on Grant in Aid of Building Works at Dunblane Primary School"
(04.03.97) 714–67

"Special Grant Report (Scotland) on Supplementary Mismatch Scheme Grant for 1997/98"
(04.03.97) 714–67

Special hospitals
521w, 737w

Special islands needs allowance
Scotland 644w

Special schools
Greater London 265w

Speech therapy
736w

Speed, Sir Keith
Questions
Train operating units, Investment 143–4w

Spellar, Mr John
Questions
Air traffic control 586–7w
Joint Service Command and Staff College 254w
Millennium Exhibition 146w
Millennium Exhibition, Railway stations 269–70w
New Parliamentary Building, Construction costs 222w
Refreshment Dept, Beer 540w
Vocational training, Computer software 263w

***Spencer, Sir Derek**, Solicitor-General*
Questions
Environmental audit, Attorney General 21–2w
Hazardous materials, Attorney General 22w

Spink, Dr Robert
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 441
Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 552–6, 562
Empty housing (25.02.97) 249–50, 252
Prisons (Alcohol Testing) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 533–4, 537, 542, 544
Questions
Fish conservation 745w

Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee
Parliamentary questions 1016

"Sport Raising the Game"
608, 693w

Sports
National Lottery 274w, 625w
Scholarships 624w
Students 624w
Wales 625w
Young people 608–9, 623–4w, 693w

Sports centres
Crystal Palace 32w, 608

Sports facilities
Rateable value 301w

Sportsgrounds
497w
Wembley 500w

Spring, Mr Richard
Questions
Deregulation initiative, Rural areas 122w
Hard core unemployed, Northern Ireland 329–30w

***Sproat, Mr Iain**, Minister of State, Dept of National Heritage*
Debates etc.
National Heritage Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 205–7, 211
Questions
Arts sponsorship 616
BBC, Broadcasting controls 32–3w
British Academy of Sport 34w, 274w, 499w, 624w
Civil service agencies, Dept of National Heritage 146w
Concessionary television licences, Wales 396w
Contracts for services, Dept of National Heritage 273w
Cultural heritage 607–8
Employment agencies, Dept of National Heritage 31–2w
English Heritage, Church buildings 499w
Fishing 611–2
Members' correspondence 272w
Museums and galleries, Capital investment 497–8w
National Lottery 145–6w, 272–3w, 501w
National Lottery, Crewe 624w
National Lottery, Sports 274w, 625w
Sports, Students 624w
Sports, Young people 608–9, 623–4w, 693w
Sports centres, Crystal Palace 32w, 608
Sports facilities, Rateable value 301w
Sportsgrounds 497w
Sportsgrounds, Wembley 500w
Theft, Dept of National Heritage 146w
Tourism, Training 500w

Squire, Ms Rachel
Debates etc.
Elderly, Scotland (26.02.97) 280, 287–9
Questions
Class sizes, Scotland 38w
Convictions, Scotland 157w
Council house waiting lists, Scotland 43w
Crime, Scotland 157w
Customs and Excise, Criminal proceedings 406–7w
Educational assessment, Scotland 582–3w
Educational finance, Scotland 38–42w
Homelessness, Scotland 232–3w
Hospital beds, Scotland 37–8w
Local government revenue, Scotland 160–2w
Police, Scotland 157w
Pre-school education, Scotland 41–3w
Repossession orders, Scotland 158–60w
Slums, Scotland 35w
Surgery, Scotland 44w

***Squire, Mr Robin**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment*
Questions
Blakelaw School Newcastle 29w
Bradfield House School Cullompton 631–2w
Civil service agencies, Dept for Education and Employment 552–3w
Class sizes, Cheshire 558w
Class sizes, Primary education 259w
Contracts for services, Dept for Education and Employment 413–4w
Dept for Education and Employment, Cash limits 369–70w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 265–6w, 335–6, 414w
Educational finance, Buckinghamshire 553w
Educational finance, East Sussex 259w
Grammar schools, Kent 336
Local education authorities, Administrative costs 323–5
Office for Standards in Education 706w
Parliamentary questions, Dept for Education and Employment 262w
Pre-school education, Age participation rates 414w
Pre-school education, Lancashire 625–6w
Pre-school education, Leeds 626w
Pre-school education, Waltham Forest 626w
Primary education 415–7w
Primary education, Rutland 25–6w
Private finance initiative, Dept for Education and Employment 706w
Schools, Humberside 263w
Schools, Security 337w
Theft, Dept for Education and Employment 264w
Vocational training, Computer software 263w

Sri Lanka
Diplomatic service 55w
Political refugees 2–3w

Staffordshire
Teachers 263–4w

Standard of living
Pensioners 311–2w

Standard spending assessments
701–2, 704–5
Rural areas 703–4
Warwickshire 704

Standards and Privileges Select Committee
(04.03.97) 806

Standing Order No 20 applications
Building Research Establishment (27.02.97) 454–5

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Questions
Nurses, Manpower 734–5w
Police 699–700w

State earnings related pension scheme
90w, 208–9w, 642w

State Veterinary Service
Manpower 323–4w

State visits
707w

Statistics
19w, 307w
Unemployment 136–7w

Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Debates etc.
Scottish Borders Council, Public petitions (04.03.97) 807
Questions
Council tax, Scotland 886–7
Income support, Social security benefits rules 563w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Questions
Deregulation initiative, Small businesses 6
Grammar schools 259w
Legislation, Northern Ireland 334w

Stephen, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1063

Stern, Mr Michael
Questions
Germany, Refugees 223w
Mynott, James, Prisoner escapes 213w

Stewart, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 728, 737–40
Questions
EC Committee of the Regions, Scotland 885
Non-domestic rates, Scotland 644–5w
Taxation, Scotland 893–4

Stockton
City Challenge 593–4w

Stowaways
428

Strang, Dr Gavin
Debates etc.
Milk deliveries, Public petitions (03.03.97) 680
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1024–5
Questions
Agricultural and Food Research Council, Scientists 482w
Agricultural research 324–6w, 674–80w
Beef, Exports 1014
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Animal feed 1011
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 746w
Central Science Laboratory, Agricultural research 652–3w
Central Veterinary Laboratory, Scientists 654w, 662–3w, 684–5w
Food poisoning 307–8w, 384–5w
Food poisoning, Scotland 523w
Government research establishments, Privatisation 621–2w
Homelessness, Rural areas 688w, 726–7w, 733w

Strang, Dr Gavin—continued
Import of live animals, Smuggling 190w
Industrial research, Government departments 621w
Institute of Food Research, Research finance 293w
Institute of Food Research, Scientists 482w, 620w, 653w, 662w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Veterinary services 685–6w
Northern Ireland Office, Agricultural research 661–4w, 723–4w
Northern Ireland Office, Veterinary services 662w
Office of Science and Technology, Agricultural research 620–1w
Office of Science and Technology, Research finance 620w
Salmonella, Scotland 524w
Scottish Office, Agricultural research 652–3w, 690–1w
Scottish Office, Veterinary services 653–4w
Slaughterhouses, Inspections 652w, 660–1w, 674w, 679–80w
State Veterinary Service, Manpower 323–4w
Veterinary investigation centres 324w
Welsh Office, Agricultural research 672–4w
Welsh Office, Veterinary services 674w

Stranraer
Armed forces training 112–3w

Straw, Mr Jack
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 432–5
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 927–36
Questions
Courts, Administrative delays 508w
Police, Civil servants' secondment 433–4w
Railway stations, Crime 52w

Streeter, Mr Gary, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
Debates etc.
Civil Procedures Bill (HL), 3R (25.02.97) 212–3
Questions
Administration of justice 624
Alternative dispute resolution 623
Billing, Lord Chancellor's Dept 691–2w
Civil proceedings 506w
Contracts for services, Lord Chancellor's Dept 507w
County courts, Closures 691w
Courts, Administrative delays 508w
Courts, Aids for handicapped 287w
Defamation, Legal advice and assistance 13w
Deferred pensions 145w
Environmental audit, Lord Chancellor's Dept 12w
Family Law Advisory Board 506–7w
Hazardous materials, Lord Chancellor's Dept 12–3w
Industrial Tribunals, Legal aid scheme 620
Law centres 507w
Legal aid 505w
Legal aid, Hormone treatments 691w
Legal aid, Per capita costs 621–2
Legal aid scheme 620–3
Legal opinion, European Court of Human Rights 319–20w
Limitation of actions 319w, 506w
Magistrates' courts 216w
Marriage 505–6w
Offenders, Legal costs 505w
Streeter, Mr Gary—continued
Private finance initiative, Lord Chancellor's Dept 692–3w
Young offenders, Legal aid 399w
Youth courts, Cullompton 505w

Stress related illnesses
736w
Child Support Agency 198w
Lost working days 8w, 29–30w, 73w

Student loans
626–7w

Student Loans Company
Privatisation 627w

Student numbers
470w, 630w
Nurses' training 441w

Student wastage
Nurses' training 445w

Students
139–40w
Sports 624w

Sub judice
Speaker's rulings and statements (05.03.97) 952–3, 960

"Success through Partnership: a Strategy for Tourism"
614–5

Suffolk
Residential care 568–9w

Sumberg, Mr David
Debates etc.
War crimes (05.03.97) 997

Sundays (Dancing and Licensing) Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 596

Surgery
Hospital admissions 445w, 519w, 656–7w
Hospital waiting lists 658w
Private patients 69w
Scotland 44w

Sustainable development
Town and country planning 9–12w

Swan Hunter Shipbuilders
245–6w

Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre
552w

Sweeney, Mr Walter
Debates etc.
Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 564–5
Wales (27.02.97) 460
Questions
Planning Inspectorate, Performance standards 469w
Road tax, Fraud 546–7w

Sykes, Mr John
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 24
Questions
British Waterways Board, External financing limits 220w
Criminal proceedings, Evidence 291–2w
Ministerial Committee on Coordination and Presentaion of Government Policy 3–4
Wolverhampton Borough Council, Direct labour departments 298–9w

Tai Cymru
see Housing for Wales

Take-up of employment
Graduates 628w
Unemployed 495–6w

Tamworth
Closed circuit television 129w

Tanks
101w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Questions
Official engagements 320w, 545w, 706w

Tax allowances
Personal pensions 135w, 707–8w
Profit sharing 137w

Tax burden
17w

Tax collection
Unpaid taxes 135w

Tax Law Rewrite Steering Committee
308w

Tax rates and bands
Income tax 302w, 407w

Tax yields
Airport tax 535w
Income tax 614w
Inheritance tax 307w
Wales 274–5w, 387w

Taxation
Agricultural chemicals 674–5w
Labour Party 1020
Life insurance 139w
Pension funds 307w
Scotland 892–4

Taxis
North Lincolnshire District Council 550w

Taylor, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Business questions (06.03.97) 1037
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1055
Questions
Sixth form education, Kirklees 553–5w

Taylor, Mr Ian, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry
Debates etc.
Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance) Bill, Rep adjourned (28.02.97) 292–3
Questions
Agricultural and Food Research Council, Scientists 482w
Computers, Millennium 60w
Copyright, Video recordings 585w
Government research establishments, Privatisation 621–2w
Industrial research, Government departments 621w
Institute of Food Research, Research finance 293w
Institute of Food Research, Scientists 482w, 620w
Insurance, Genetics 293–4w
Medical research, Research finance 176w
Office of Science and Technology, Agricultural research 620–1w
Office of Science and Technology, Research finance 620w
Patents, Genetic engineering 481w
Research councils, Government grants 252w
Science and technology research, Contracts of employment 480–1w
Science and technology research, Government grants 479w

Taylor, Rt Hon John D
Questions
Civil disorder, Northern Ireland 239w
Integrated schools, Newtownards 95w
Road accidents, Comber 96w
School population, Newtownards 95w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 183–4w

Taylor, Mr John M, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Competition and ConsumerAffairs
Debates etc.
Company Accounts (Disclosure of Directors Emoluments) Regulations (03.03.97) 665–8, 672–5, 677–8
Questions
Age, Dept of Trade and Industry 479w
Bankruptcy 703–4w
Billing, Dept of Trade and Industry 704w
Chancery plc, Company liquidations 703w
Companies House 170–1w
Contracts for services, Dept of Trade and Industry 411–2w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Government offices for the regions 292–3w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Publicity 177–9w
Employment agencies, Dept of Trade and Industry 408–11w
Employment protection, Deregulation initiative 292w
Government assistance to industry, West Midlands 171–2w, 174–6w
"Industrial Action and Trade Unions" 294w
Intimidation, Industrial health and safety 177w
Intimidation, Lost working days 176–7w
Metrication, Prosecutions 171w
Minimum wage 246w
Office of Fair Trading, Brewing industry 583w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Trade and Industry 703w
Regional selective assistance, West Midlands 172–3w
Science and technology, Women's employment 480w
Theft, Dept of Trade and Industry 176w

Taylor, Mr Matthew
Questions
Dera Radiation Protection Services 400–2w
Publicity, Dept of Social Security 81w
Publicity, Ministry of Defence 101–2w
Radium, Defence research 586w
Russia, Seals 425w
UN Conference on Environment and Development 696

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, Medium term financial strategy (26.02.97) 355–8
Questions
Armed forces, Germany 590w
Cross border cooperation in Ireland 330w
EC defence policy, France 589–90w
European communities, Information services 4–5
Oil industry, EC law 583–4w
UK contributions to EC budget 17–8

Taylor Inquiry
see Hillsborough Stadium Inquiry

Teacher training
School discipline 325–6
Shortage subjects 556–7w

Teachers
Child abuse 26–7w
Early retirement 27w, 261w, 417–8w
East Sussex 264w
Lost working days 29–30w
Northern Ireland 336w
Performance appraisal 898–9
Scotland 645w
Staffordshire 263–4w
Vetting 414–5w

Teachers' pensions
27–8w

Telecommunications (Fraud) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475

Telephone tapping
Admissibility of evidence 603–4w

Television licences
Fine defaulters 695w

Television programmes
499w

Temple-Morris, Mr Peter
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, UK repayments from EC budget 571w
Peace keeping operations, Armed forces deployment 617–8w
UN resolutions 701w

Temporary employment
331–3

Territorial Army
Cardiff 257–8w

Terrorism
Northern Ireland 183–4w, 330w, 332–3w, (05.03.97) 917–59

Thames Water
Cryptosporidia 657w

Theft
Attorney General 235–6w
Cabinet Office 166w
Central Office of Information 166w
Dept for Education and Employment 264w
Dept of Health 268w
Dept of National Heritage 146w
Dept of Social Security 717w
Dept of the Environment 459w
Dept of Trade and Industry 176w
Dept of Transport 54w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 56w
Home Office 433w
Luton 4w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 322w
Ministry of Defence 371–8w
Northern Ireland Office 509–10w
Scottish Office 456–7w
Treasury 305w
Welsh Office 277w

Therapeutic earnings allowance
Invalidity benefits 525w

"This Common Inheritance Sixth Year Report"
466w, 633w

Thompson, Sir Donald
Debates etc
NHS (24.02.97) 44
Questions
Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1996/97, Compensation 697w
National Lottery 618

Thompson, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 631–2

Thompson, Mr Patrick—continued
Questions
Aid financed trade 467–8w
Defence Secondary Care Agency 186–8w
Highways Agency, Performance standards 297w
Pensioners, Personal income 201w
School discipline 325–6

Three Valleys Water Services
Cryptosporidia 732–3w

Thurnham, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Child abuse, Public petitions (25.02.97) 248
Lever Park Bill 1996/97, Public petitions (25.02.97) 248
Sex Offenders Bill, Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 220–2, 226–7, 235–9, 246–7
Questions
Animal feed, EC action 321w
Birmingham relief road 418w
Child benefit, Data banks 142–3
Children, Departmental coordination 70w
Children, Local government social services 381–2w
Community care, Local government expenditure 697
Local government social services, Performance standards 381w
Lorries, Motor vehicle safety 502w
Paedophilia 132w
Partnership insurance 445w
Perinatal mortality 16–7w
Pupil exclusions 263w
Saunders, Philip, Death 538w
Sexual offences, Scotland 523w
Special hospitals 737w

Tickets
Railway travel 550w

Timms, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1103–8
Questions
A13, Bridges 53w
Further education, EC grants and loans 337w
Further education, Educational finance 149–50w
Habitual residence test 135–6
Inland Revenue, Performance standards 406w, 492–3w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 429–30w

Tipping, Mr Paddy
Debates etc.
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1032
Questions
Arable area payments scheme 743–4w

Tipping of waste
460w
Air pollution 460w
EC action 459w
Magheramorne 245w
Methane 459w
Planning permission 599w

Tornado aircraft
Repairs and maintenance 113w, 115–6w

Torness power station
909–10

Touhig, Mr Don
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 537w

Tourism
East Midlands 498w
Government grants 613–4
Training 500w

Town and country planning
Scotland (25.02.97) 195, 197
Sustainable development 9–12w

Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R*, money res* and rem stages (25.02.97) 195
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475

Town Centres (Insurance and Restoration) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 595

Townsend, Sir Cyril
Debates etc.
War crimes (05.03.97) 996–9, 1002

Tracey, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 449–50
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 159
Questions
Gulf war syndrome, Organophosphorous pesticides 252–3w

Track access grant
296w

Trade competitiveness
Manufacturing industries 9–10
Small businesses 59–60w

Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1994
Questions
54w

Train operating units
Finance 294–6w, 419w, 612w
Investment 143–4w

Training
Scottish Ambulance Service 229–31w
Tourism 500w

Training and enterprise councils
Finance 29w, 558w

Training and work experience scheme
St Helena 413w

Travel requirements
Vaccination 67–8w

Treasury
Age 134–5w
Civil service agencies 490w
Consultants 496w
Environmental audit 136w
Hazardous materials 136w
Parliamentary questions 303–4w
Private finance initiative 408w
Theft 305w
UN Conference on Environment and Development 707w

Treaties
Mines 120w

Tredinnick, Mr David
Questions
Environment protection, Crime 703

Tree felling
Balblair 647w

Trickett, Mr Jon
Debates etc.
NHS (24.02.97) 67–70

Trimble, Mr David
Debates etc.
Hospitals, Northern Ireland (05.03.97) 820–3, 834

Trimble, Mr David*—*continued
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 943
Questions
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Northern Ireland 336w, 511w
Educational finance, Northern Ireland 509–11w
Northern Ireland government 414
Teachers, Northern Ireland 336w

Trotter, Mr Neville
Questions
Pension funds, Taxation 307w

Tugboats
53–4w

Tunnels
London Underground 501w

Turner, Mr Dennis
Questions
Government grants to local authorities, Wolverhampton 218–20w
Local education authorities, Administrative costs 324

Twinn, Dr Ian
Debates etc.
Cyprus (03.03.97) 684–7

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1026–7
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 398–9w

Tyrrell Committee
see Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee

UK contributions to EC budget
17–8, 614–5w

UK membership of EC
(04.03.97) 711–3

UK repayments from EC budget
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 571w

UK trade with EC
246–8w

UN Conference on Environment and Development
55w, 595w, 625w, 633–4w, 695–6
Dept of the Environment 634w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 618w
Treasury 707w

UN Environment Programme
152–3w

UN resolutions
701w

Unemployed
Take-up of employment 495–6w

Unemployment
14–5w, 17w, 141w, 262w, 331, 333–4, 493w
Cumbria 330–1
Germany 333
Scotland 643w
Statistics 136–7w
Wales 448w, 710

UNESCO
57w

United Kingdom Membership of European Union (Research) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
1R (04.03.97) 711–3

United Nations
Medals 593w

United Nations Personnel Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27.02.97) 475

University of Ulster
100w

Unpaid taxes
Tax collection 135w

Unparliamentary expressions
Speaker's rulings and statements (26.02.97) 322

US bases
Security of tenure 118–9w

Vacancies
Employment service local offices 469–70w
Hospital consultants 267w, 514–6w

Vaccination
Influenza 73–4w, 382–3w, 388w
Travel requirements 67–8w

VAT
Building repairs 405w
Domestic energy consumption 560w
Public contracts 472w

Veterinary investigation centres
324w

Veterinary medicine
Northern Ireland 662–3w
Scotland 654w
Wales 672–3w

Veterinary services
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 685–6w
Northern Ireland Office 662w
Scottish Office 653–4w
Welsh Office 674w

Vetting
Teachers 414–5w

Victim support schemes
538–9w

Victims of Crime Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (28.02.97) 596

Video recordings
Copyright 585w
Prison visits 288–9w
Prisoners 214–6w, 288w, 428w

Viggers, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
NATO (26.02.97) 259
Questions
Hedges and ditches, Nature conservation 744w
Lone parents, Child care 141
Navy 105w
Trade competitiveness, Manufacturing industries 10

Vincent, Reg
Pensions (26.02.97) 311–8

Vitamin B6
567w, 680–1w

Vocational training
Computer software 263w

Voluntary organisations
Glasgow 581w
Scotland 581w

Voluntary work
Criminal records 463w, 700w

Waldegrave, Rt Hon William, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1059, 1062, 1065, 1067, 1069–70, 1114–24
Questions
Public sector borrowing requirement 493–4w
Public sector borrowing requirement, Scotland 134w
Social security benefits, Expenditure 19w

Wales
(27.02.97) 457–524
Aerospace industry 448w
Antibiotics 92w
Arts finance 616
Blood transfusion services 91w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 668w
Child workers 725w
Class sizes 726w
Cold weather payments 718w
Community hospitals 275w
Concessionary television licences 396w
Consumer expenditure 140–1w
Council house sales 387w
Death 665–7w, 724w
Disability living allowance 275w
District health authorities 94w
Food inspection 674w
Freemasonry 725w
Gastroschisis 672w
General Certificate of Secondary Education 92w
General practitioners 388–90w
GP fundholders 93–4w
Grazing land 91w
Health authorities 727w
High technology 447–8w
Homelessness 726–7w
Hospital patients 665–6w
Income tax 407w, 497w
Influenza 388w
Listed buildings 671–2w
Local government 90w
Local government finance 724w
Local government staff 668–71w
Millennium 500w
Motorways 387w
National insurance contributions 309w
NHS finance 277w
NHS trusts 449–50w
Planning Inspectorate 469w
Prescriptions 91–2w, 388w, 449w
Public expenditure 386w
Retirement pensions 720w
Sports 625w
Tax yields 274–5w, 387w
Unemployment 448w, 710
Veterinary medicine 672–3w
Wheelchairs 275w
Youth unemployment 448w

Walker, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Basic pension plus, Points of order (05.03.97) 913
Elderly, Scotland (26.02.97) 280–2, 288
Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (26.02.97) 381, 383–4, 394–5
Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 772–3, 775, 778, 780–2, 787
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 727, 743–6, 748
NATO (26.02.97) 257–60, 267
Questions
Assisted places scheme, Scotland 654–6w
Capital challenge, Scotland 889–90
Cost per pupil, Scotland 900
River Tay, Flood control 645–6w

Walker, Mr Cecil
Questions
Northern Ireland Housing Council 579w
Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Contracts for services 574w
Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Finance 574w
Public sector housing, Northern Ireland 573w, 579w

Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Questions
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 442w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Blood donors 517w

Wallace, Mr James
Debates etc.
Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 774, 783–5
Questions
EC Committee of the Regions, Scotland 885–6
Hunterston B, Radiation hazards 906
MV Braer, Oil pollution 231w, 418w

Wallenberg, Raoul
146

Waller, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 629

Walley, Ms Joan
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 191–2w
Buses, Safety belts 270w
Domestic energy conservation 217w
UN Conference on Environment and Development 625w, 633–4w

Waltham Forest
Pre-school education 626w
Public sector housing 728w
Single regeneration budget 598–9w

Waltham Forest Housing Action Trust
599w

Wandsworth
Dentists 382w

War crimes
(05.03.97) 997–1004

War Crimes Act 1991
Debates etc.
(05.03.97) 997–1004

War pensions
Ear disorders 398w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 719w

Wardell, Mr Gareth
Debates etc.
Wales (27.02.97) 495–501

Wardle, Mr Charles,
Debates etc.
Political refugees (05.03.97) 850–3

Warwickshire
Standard spending assessments 704

Waste disposal
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 79w, 190–3w, 371w, 746w
RAF Quedgely 371w

Waste Prevention Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* (28.02.97) 595

Water abstraction
Rivers 598w

Water and sewerage companies
Company finance 602w

Water charges
Profits taxes 148

Water pollution
Prosecutions 153–4w

Water resources
221w

Water Service
see Northern Ireland Water Service Agency

Water supply
Cryptosporidia 657w, 731w, 737–8w

Water supply industry
Government grants 217–8w, 464w
Scotland 642–3w

Water transport
Millennium Exhibition 124w

Waterson, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, Points of order (28.02.97) 527–8
Questions
Educational finance, East Sussex 259w
European Court of Human Rights, Findlay, Alexander 485w
Offenders, Legal costs 505w
Prisoners of war, Pay deductions 120w
Tourism, Government grants 613–4

Watts, Mr John, Minister of State, Dept of Transport
Debates etc.
Avon ring road (06.03.97) 1130–2
Road traffic, Wilford (04.03.97) 814–6
Road Traffic Reduction Bill, 3R (28.02.97) 587–90
Questions
Birmingham relief road 418w
British Rail, Redundancy 50–1w
British Railways Board, External financing limits 715w
Bus services, Rural areas 546w
Bus Working Group 142–3w
Channel tunnel, Fires 551w, 714–5w
Channel tunnel, Railway safety 714w
Dual carriageways 270–1w
Freight facilities grant 296w
Highways Agency, Performance standards 297w
London and Continental Railways 551w
Lorries, Axle weights 50w, 611–2w, 715–6w
M25, Road works 142w
M45, Litter 609w
Motorways, Road length 54–5w
National Bus Company, Privatisation 419w
North London railway line 272w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Transport 713w
Railfreight Distribution, Privatisation 419w, 713w
Railtrack, Debts written off 611w
Railway land 502w
Railway safety, Fences 551–2w, 716–7w
Railway stations, Crime 52w
Railway transport, Privatisation 51w, 501w
Railway travel, Tickets 550w
Railway workers, Asbestosis 51–2w
Railway workers, Manpower 713w
Road signs 54w
Road works 609w
Roads 607–10w
Rolling stock, Privatisation 418–9w
Royal train 50w
Salisbury bypass 504–5w, 712–3w
South West Trains 49w
South Yorkshire Supertram 52–3w

Watts, Mr John—continued
Train operating units, Finance 294–6w, 419w, 612w
Train operating units, Investment 143–4w

Weapons
Testing 370–1w

Weather
Death 226w, 490–1w, 665–6w
Hospital patients 229–30w, 440–1w, 508–10w
Medical treatments 228–9w, 440–1w, 665–6w

Weizman, Ezer
544w

Welfare foods
Mothers 519–20w

Welsh, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Elderly, Scotland (26.02.97) 295
Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 772, 788–9
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 714, 728–9, 752–5, 760
National Heritage Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 206
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 427–8
Educational policy, Scotland 899
Further education, Scotland 582w
Local government finance, Scotland 645w
Mortgage relief, Scotland 138w
Public sector borrowing requirement, Scotland 134w
Right to buy, Scotland 36–7w, 44–5w
Sleep 457–8w

Welsh Development Agency Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (04.03.97) 794–806

Welsh language
Election administration 667w

Welsh Office
Age 274w
Agricultural research 672–4w
Billing 726w
Civil service agencies 276w
Parliamentary questions 276w
Private finance initiative 725w
Theft 277w
Veterinary services 674w

Wembley
Sportsgrounds 500w

West Midlands
Closed circuit television 129w
Foreign investment in UK 62–3w
Government assistance to industry 171–2w, 174–6w
Regional selective assistance 172–3w

Wheelchairs
Wales 275w

Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Debates etc.
Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order (05.03.97) 961–3, 993
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Prisoners 331w
Billing, Northern Ireland Office 722w
Civil disorder, Northern Ireland 239w
Civil service agencies, Northern Ireland Office 185w
Crimes of violence, Northern Ireland 660w
Cross border cooperation in Ireland 330–1w
Death, Northern Ireland 241–3w

Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John—continued
Legislation, Northern Ireland 334w
Northern Ireland Office, Public expenditure 243–4w
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review 334w
Northern Ireland Parades Commission 333w
Parliamentary questions, Northern Ireland Office 240w
Police interrogation, Northern Ireland 332w
Private finance initiative, Northern Ireland 580–1w
Private finance initiative, Northern Ireland Office 721–2w
Public appointments, Northern Ireland 721w
Rating revaluations, Northern Ireland 333w
Riot control weapons, Northern Ireland 721w
Scottish Grand Committee, Northern Ireland Office 100w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 183–4w, 330w, 332–3w
Theft, Northern Ireland Office 509–10w

White fish
Fish conservation 571w

Whitemoor Prison
Prisoner escapes 428–9w, 694w

Whitemoor Prison Escape Inquiry
428–9w, 693w

Whittingdale, Mr John
Debates etc.
Electronic government (03.03.97) 634
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 745w
Council tax, Multiple occupation 299w
Film industry 609

Wicks, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Gaming clubs, Croydon 538w
Home energy efficiency scheme 154–5w, 221–2w
Maintenance, Children 140

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann, Minister of State, Home Office
Questions
Belmarsh Prison, Prison accommodation 289w
Belmarsh Prison, Prison education services 429w
Belmarsh Prison, Prisoners' release 700w
Category A prisoners, Prison visits 289w
Category C prisoners, Prison staff 606w
Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1996/97, Compensation 290–1w, 697w
Homicide, Prison sentences 697w
Immigrant detainees, Hunger strikes 603w
Immigrant detainees, Prisoners' transfers 216w
McAliskey, Roisin, Extradition 214w, 290w, 430w
Military Corrective Training Centre Colchester, Industrial health and safety 213w
Mynott, James, Prisoner escapes 213w
Prison population, Ethnic groups 213w
Prison rules 434w
Prison visits, Drug crimes 437–8w
Prison visits, Video recordings 288–9w
Prisoners, Childbirth 435–6w
Prisoners, Complaints 214w
Prisoners, Drug abuse 213–4w, 288w, 434–5w
Prisoners, Health 289–90w
Prisoners, Restraint equipment 437w

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann—continued
Prisoners, Video recordings 214–6w, 428w
Prisons 696w
Prisons, Babies 438w
Prisons, Construction 436w
Prisons, Drug seizures 438–9w
Prisons, Security 694w
Prisons, Ships 212w, 606w
Rehabilitation of offenders 211–2w
Television licences, Fine defaulters 695w
Whitemoor Prison, Prisoner escapes 428–9w, 694w
Whitemoor Prison Escape Inquiry 693w
Young offenders, Prison sentences 695–6w

Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Questions
Drugs, Road accidents 4w
Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1996/97, Compensation 290–1w
Firearms certificates, Greater London 3w
Theft, Luton 4w

Wigley, Mr Dafydd
Debates etc.
Wales (27.02.97) 459–60, 463, 474
Welsh Development Agency Bill, Rep and 3R (04.03.97) 796–9, 806
Questions
Battlefield artillery target engagement system 488–9w
BBC, Broadcasting controls 32–3w
British Petroleum, Colombia 55w
Bryn-Y-Neuadd Hospital 276–7w
Cancer, Medical treatments 276w
Civil servants, London allowance 287–8w
Cold weather payments, Wales 718w
Community hospitals, Wales 275w
Disability living allowance, Wales 275w
Film industry 609–10
Freemasonry, Non-departmental public bodies 725w
Government assistance to industry, South Wales 275–6w
Hyperactivity, Medical research 69w
Listed buildings, Wales 671–2w
Local government finance, Wales 724w
Members' travel, Costs 167–8w
National income 496–7w
NHS finance, Wales 277w
Overseas aid 151w
Tax yields, Wales 274–5w
Train operating units, Finance 612w
Unemployment, Statistics 136–7w
Wheelchairs, Wales 275w

Wilford
Road traffic (04.03.97) 809–16

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 449, (06.03.97) 1041
European Armaments Agency (05.03.97) 867–70
Questions
Common agricultural policy 1009
Housing associations, Hillingdon 698
Northern Ireland government 420

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1030
Questions
Civil servants, Pay 125w
Territorial Army, Cardiff 257–8w

Williams, Mr Alan W
Debates etc.
Business questions (27.02.97) 452
Wales (27.02.97) 465, 505–8
Questions
Beef, Northern Ireland 329w

Williams, Mr Alan W—continued
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 78–9w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Northern Ireland 93–5w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 190–1w

Wilshire, Mr David
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 918, 930–1, 944–5

Wilson, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Basic pension plus, Points of order (05.03.97) 912–3
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 761–2
National Heritage Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (25.02.97) 200–3, 206
Questions
Economic situation, North Ayrshire 644w
Glenfeshie Estate, Management agreements 687w
Hospitals, Public telephones 74w
Hunterston B, Radiation hazards 906–7
NHS trusts, Scotland 43w
Privatisation 412w
Salmon, Scotland 895–6
Shareholders, Privatisation 320w

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Administration of justice (27.02.97) 438
Basic pension plus, Points of order (05.03.97) 912
London Underground, Privatisation (25.02.97) 164
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 918
Questions
Conservative Party, Finance 708–9
Departmental coordination 124w
Disability living allowance 209–10w
Hong Kong, Ministers' visits abroad 314w
Income support, Families 199w
Northern Ireland government 421
Prosecutions 133w

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1035
Questions
Local government finance 594w
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits uprating 134

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order (05.03.97) 970
Business questions (06.03.97) 1045

Winterton, Mr Nicholas—continued
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, Points of order (26.02.97) 342
Oral question time intervention (26.02.97) 325
Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (03.03.97) 652
Public expenditure (06.03.97) 1056
Slaughterhouses (06.03.97) 1029
Questions
Cerebrovascular diseases 71–2w
Grant maintained schools, Cheshire 322–3
Northern Ireland government 419–20
Pensioners, Personal income 201w
Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research 48w

Wise, Audrey
Debates etc.
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, Points of order (27.02.97) 528
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order (05.03.97) 924
Railway safety, Public petitions (04.03.97) 808
Women, Points of order (05.03.97) 912
Questions
Hospital waiting lists 379–80w

Wolverhampton
Government grants to local authorities 218–20w
School administration 324

Wolverhampton Borough Council
Direct labour departments 298–9w

Women
Health service staff 441w

Women's employment
EC countries 16w
Science and technology 480w

Wood
600w
Exports 620w

Woodcock Inquiry
see Whitemoor Prison Escape Inquiry

Worcestershire
National Lottery 498w

"Working together under the Children Act 1989"
697w

Worthington, Mr Tony
Debates etc
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 718
Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill (HL), 2R and money res (25.02.97) 187–9, 193
Questions
Educational finance, Northern Ireland 418

Wray, Mr James
Debates etc.
Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order (04.03.97) 718, 722

Wray, Mr James—continued
Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill (HL), 2R and money res (25.02.97) 183–5
Questions
National Savings Agency 306–7w

Wright, Dr Tony
Questions
Income tax, Tax yields 614w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Questions
UN Conference on Environment and Development 634w
UN Conference on Environment and Development, Dept of the Environment 634w
UN Conference on Environment and Development, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 618w
UN Conference on Environment and Development, Treasury 707w

York
British Rail 51w
British Rail Engineering 51–2w

Yorkshire and Humberside
Armed forces recruitment 106w

Young, Rt Hon Sir George, Secretary of State for Transport
Debates etc.
London Underground, Ministerial statements (25.02.97) 149–65
London Underground, Points of order (25.02.97) 165
Questions
Light dues 716w
London Underground, Tunnels 501w

Young offenders
432w
Administration of justice 464w
Crime prevention 127w, 539–40w
Legal aid 399w
Prison sentences 695–6w
Scotland 523w

Young people
Alcoholic drinks 537w
Sports 608–9, 623–4w, 693w

Youth courts
Cullompton 505w

Youth employment
139–40w

Youth unemployment
14w
Northern Ireland 422–3
School leaving 261w
Wales 448w

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